BLUE BOOK

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Harold Titus, Arthur Akers, H. Bedford-Jones *and many others*

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The Problem of Evil

MAGAZINES are now and then urged not to print stories dealing with crime—lest weak-minded persons be thereby incited to commit crime. And one of course at once agrees that a story glorifying crime or criminals has no place in a reputable publication. It is indeed difficult to see how a story glorifying a criminal could be at all persuasive or convincing. For it is obvious enough that even in these days of difficult law-enforcement the criminal leads a miserable life: furtive, hunted, the hand of every honest man—and most men are honest—turned against him; and though the wicked may sometimes prosper, theirs is a tinsel prosperity, and the rewards of even the temporarily successful criminal can be no compensation for a life lived in the terror of justice and in the hatred of one's fellows.

Crime is, however,—like the whole problem of evil,—one of the facts of life. Philosophers and theologians of different schools have their several explanations of this problem of evil: Why does it exist at all in this presumably best of all possible worlds? But whatever answer to this problem is given by our personal convictions, we most of us admit that it does, to our discomfort, most patently exist. And therefore fiction, which holds a mirror up to nature and life, must of necessity take cognizance of it.

Indeed all fiction must of necessity be much occupied with this problem of evil. For the essence of a good story is drama; and the essence of drama is conflict—man's eternal conflict with the parsimony of nature and with the fury of the elements, his rivalries with other men in love or war or business, his occasional sharp struggles with the criminal. Thus it happens that if you look over the stories in this or any other issue of this magazine you will see that most of them deal with a conflict against some manifestation of this problem of evil; and some very good ones deal with some sort of battle against crime or criminals.

NOTABLE among our stories of this type have been the crime-mysteries set forth with such engaging simplicity by Charles Lent—like "A Fast One that Failed" in this issue; and the adventures in combat with the so-called modern type of criminal like "A Tartar on the Spot" and "The Day of Doom" presented by Seven Anderton. And you will, we think, be glad to know that one of the best of these, "Phantom Foemen," a really unusual and vividly imagined novelette by Mr. Anderton, is scheduled for our forthcoming July issue... Yes, you will find in these pages stories dealing with crime, just as you will find stories dealing with love and war and shipwreck and other facts of adventurous life. But God forbid that we should ever think that a story depicting a criminal's life as pleasant or happy would be either plausible or pleasing to anyone.

—The Editor.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, Circulation, Etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912

of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE published monthly at Dayton, Ohio, for April 1st, 1932.
State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared John D. Hartman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Assistant Treasurer of The McCall Company, publisher of The Blue Book Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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We have come to feel, however, that there is a certain injustice in the conditions of our offer. For stories are not like sugar or flour, to be appraised and purchased by the pound, at a definite rate. Some are inherently of a higher quality than others; some can be told adequately in a thousand words; some can with difficulty be compressed into four thousand words.

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The BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

HE went to sea at the age of fourteen; and—as the short autobiography on the opposite page makes clear—he has done a lot of adventuring on the high seas since that time. His "The Sea King," "Barratry," "The Able Seaman" and other excellent stories of deep water have appeared in these pages. Others are to come—notably a most remarkable one that is scheduled for next month under the title—

"The Parrot"

THE McCALL COMPANY, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine

William B. Warner, *President and Treasurer* John C. Sterling, *Vice-President* Francis Hutter, *Secretary*

DONALD KENNICOTT, Editor

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Our Blue Book Writers

ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

WHEN my father was twenty he suffered with the Wanderlust and disappeared into Australia for eight years. Later he went to New Zealand. One of his brothers was a master mariner in his early twenties. His father wandered a long way before settling in London, England. A great-grandfather of mine was a parson in a little church in Tromsö, Norway, from which country we first came.

On my mother's side all the men were sailors. Her father was a carpenter in the days of the old clipper ships, wrecked once off the Yangtze River and with the second mate was the only survivor. He sailed for thirty-five years. His father was also a ship's carpenter. And his father before him. All my maternal uncles are sailors, one a sailmaker in windjammers. Two of my cousins are sea-going ship's engineers. It seems we were always wrapped up in the sea.

I was born in London, England and went to sea at fourteen. Wrecked twice before my sixteenth birthday, once in the Bay of Fundy by fire and once near Cape Race by fog and the sea. Latter time lived in a hut made from timbers from the ship, built on a swamp. Five weeks before relief came.

Have been "on the beach" in Liverpool, St. John's, New Brunswick, Vancouver, B. C. and Winnipeg. Worked a way across Canada coast to coast. Beat it across the line into Washington and Oregon. Slept in most of the jails between Blain and Portland, charge vagrancy. Had a spell at railroading, farming, mining, stevedoring. Was one of the crew of the *Berwick Castle* when that ship took the Sultan of Zanzibar prisoner of war to St. Helena.

Served in the British Merchant Service during the war, for which the two regular medals issued were gratefully received. Also served in the 53d Manchesters, British Army. This bunch went to the Rhine after I got out and went to sea again.

Started writing at about eighteen, first story in *Wide World* magazine in 1920, and that woven round the Sultan of Zanzibar and an incident that occurred during the voyage to St. Helena.

As to my tastes, I like poetry, swimming, music, boxing, sailing and beer. Dislikes, the 18th Amendment and women novelists.

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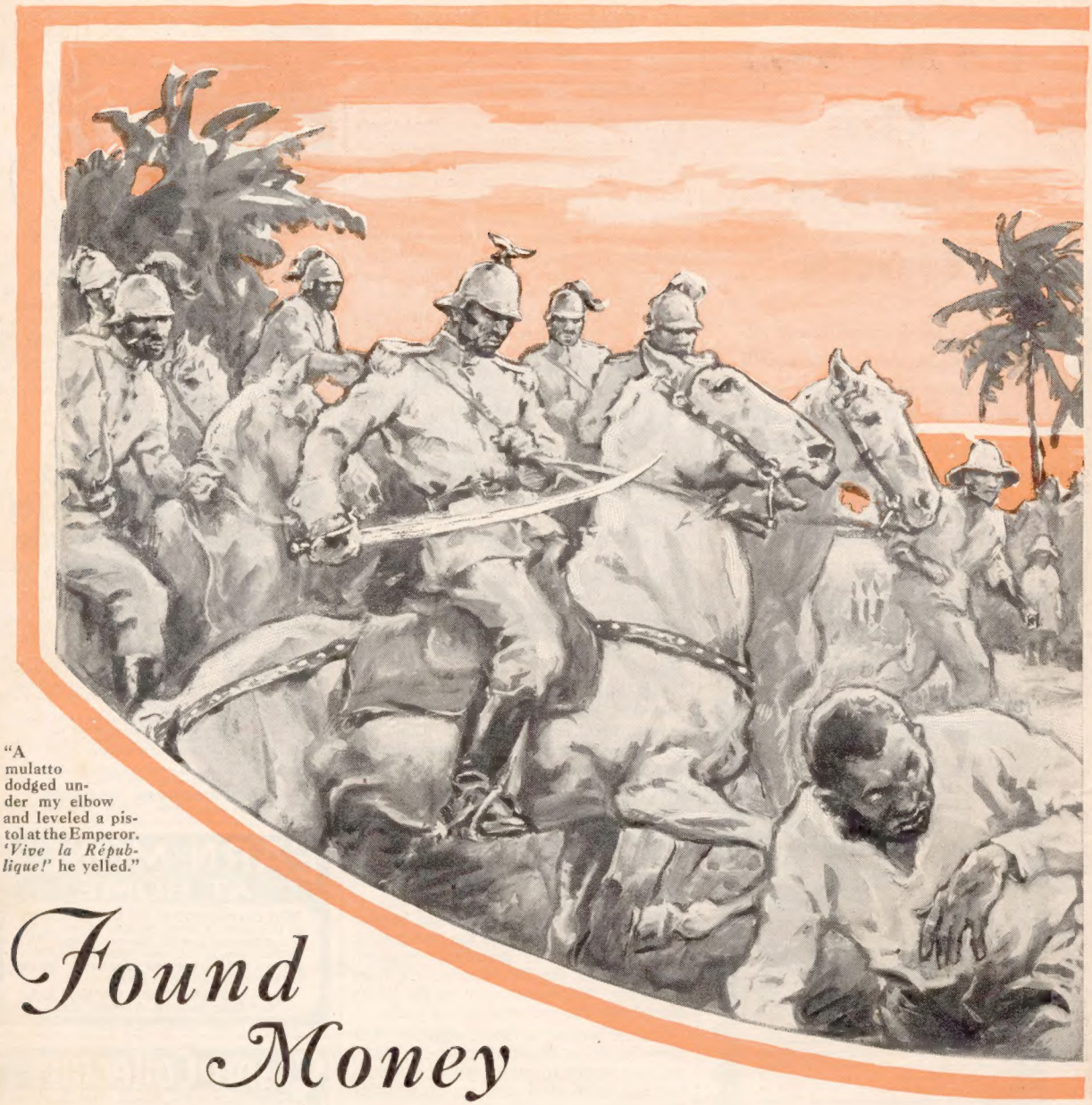

"A mulatto dodged under my elbow and leveled a pistol at the Emperor. *'Vive la République!'* he yelled."

Found Money

IT was a day of great, booming winds. The sky was a harsh blue; and if you shut your eyes, and then opened them quickly, you could almost swear the dunes were a herd of crouching monsters sunning their gray backs in the golden light—an illusion intensified when I stumbled upon a bristle of bone-white timbers in a deep hollow, facing seaward, for all the world like the crumbled remains of a dinosaur, upthrust from the Mesozoic slime, but in reality, I knew, the wreck of the frigate *Triton,* a British blockader which had been driven ashore in 1778.

I scuffed idly at the drifted sand which held her splintered ribs, and was more startled than surprised to feel my toe encounter a metallic substance a few inches beneath the surface. The optimism of a born romantic kindled into flame. A sea-chest of guineas! A purser's safe, at least! I dropped to my knees, and clawed hungrily at the sand until I had revealed a neat stack of wedge-shaped bars, twelve inches long, their luster dimmed by oxidization, a hint of powdered wood indicating the box which had contained them. Ah, well, if it wasn't gold, it was silver. Not a bad haul for a morning's tramp! And after a moment's consideration, I took one from the pile, covered the rest again, and headed for town. Treasure-trove, of course, should be removed by stealth, preferably in the dark o' the moon. It would be unpardonable to stalk blandly through Commerce Street by daylight with a sack of bar-silver on your shoulder.

My idea was to ask the people at the bank to assay the specimen; but a block short of Porter's Wharf, I spied Cap'n Saul Sprague standing deferentially beside Jim Yardley's taxi, and decided to seek his opinion first. A squat atom of an ancient, Cap'n Saul, with a voice like a foghorn, and an old whaleman's assurance that no problem is beyond him.

"Tell him I'll be right along, ma'am," he was saying in

Illustrated
by George Avison

A story you will not soon forget, by the brilliant author of "Porto Bello Gold" and "A Manifest Destiny."

By

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

his usual mild tones. "No, thank ye, I won't come aboard —time for my quarterdeck walk."

And he doffed his battered derby very gallantly to the little old lady who leaned out the taxi-door to smile good-by to him as Jim Yardley put the car in gear. She was the prettiest little old lady I'd ever seen, her cheeks like rose-petals under their mesh of wrinkles, her brown eyes still soft and lustrous. And the way she smiled made you feel glad you were alive.

"Who was that, Cap'n Saul?" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"That?" he returned as if surprised by my ignorance. "Why, that's Miss Sally Ellicott. Keeps house for Cap'n Hawkins, up-along."

I was impressed. Cap'n Hawkins is a legendary figure in the town. He lives in a big square white house on Commerce Street, and for years his age has kept him indoors, except for an occasional sortie in summer when Jim Yardley hauls out a decrepit hack, and Cap'n Saul and two or three other retired whalemen escort him on a ceremonial visit to what used to be Sprague's shipyard on what used to be the Old Harbor. But I was too much concerned for the moment with my own affairs to spare further interest in that direction. I whipped the *Triton's* bar from under my sweater, and demanded Cap'n Saul's opinion of it, babbling an account of the morning's work which puckered his blunt features into a leathery grin.

"Well, well!" he chuckled. "So some one's got something out of the *Triton* at last! She aint been above graound in a considerable spell." He hefted the bar tentatively. "'Baout the right weight, I'd say. Used to ship 'em up from Vera Cruz. But we'll see." He produced his pocketknife, and nicked the grimy surface, and his chuckle rumbled into laughter. "Haw, haw, haw! Too bad. 'Pears like you've got a good hand-wrought steel spike, though—Eighteenth Century stuff. Carpenter's stores. Wouldn't wonder but Mis' Reynolds, to the

Antique Shop, would give you a quarter for it. They come in handy for folks buildin' houses to look old."

I joined in his laughter a bit shamefacedly, and started to chuck the spike into the gutter, but Cap'n Saul caught my arm.

"No, no!" he remonstrated. "You hang onto it. There's more to treasure than gold and silver. Matter of fact, I know one would get a laugh out of it." And then, abruptly: "Ever hear of Soulouque's treasure?"

I shook my head.

"Well, I just promised Miss Sally I'd stop in for a gam with Cap'n Hawkins, and he's the one to tell 'baout it, seein' he handled it. You come along, and we'll try how the Old Man feels, eh?"

He spun me around with a purposefulness which took no account of possible objection—not that it would have entered my head to protest such an invitation; and we headed upstreet past Town Hall, Old First and Dwyer's Ship Chandlery, actually a coalyard in these degenerate days. The narrow sidewalk was thronged with Portygee fishermen in seaboots and sou'westers. An artist had set up his easel by the approach to Pacific Wharf, and was sketching the seiners lying where the whalers used to rub bulwarks against the mossy piles. Beyond the foreshore the harbor stretched desolate as far as the curving spur of Long Point, tipped by a toy lighthouse.

"See that?" Cap'n Saul demanded belligerently. "When I was a boy, there'd be two-three hundred craft lyin' there. Naow, if it wasn't for summer boarders and painters and writin' fellers like you, there wouldn't be any town wuth speakin' of."

"What does Cap'n Hawkins think of it?" I asked curiously.

"Never heard him say. Keeps to himself. Always did. Isn't like the rest of us. We were whalemen—and proud of it. But him! He's skippered a McKay clipper. Nobody left like Isaac Hawkins, and there never were many to beat him when sailors *were* sailors."

"Did you sail with him, Cap'n Saul?"

"My father shipped me with him in the *Wanderer* sixty year' ago." His explosive chuckle drew the attention of passers-by. "Didn't think I was that old, did you? Well, sir, I was seventy-five last March, and I'm a boy 'longside of Cap'n Hawkins. Ninety-five, and sound as salted oak, only for a mite of shakiness in his underpinning."

THE Hawkins house loomed before us, immaculate in white and green paint, and we turned into a path bordered by perennials; lilac hedges shed a delicate fragrance on the air, and trellises gleamed with luscious Silver Moons. The Portygee maid who answered our knock wore a dainty apron over her print dress, and a frilly cap on her permanent-wave.

"Miss Sally to home, Philomena?" inquired Cap'n Saul.

"Yes sir, right in to the parlor," Philomena dimpled expertly.

I caught my breath at the beauty of the wide hall, terminating in a double staircase which sprang gracefully to a landing crowned by a three-light window; but I forgot architecture as Cap'n Saul led me through a doorway on the left, and Miss Sally Ellicott rose from the rug-frame at which she was working, to acknowledge my introduction. Miss Sally! But why had she never married, I asked myself. She was the lonely man's ideal of a grandmother, as warm and vital, yet as other-worldly, as the Rembrandt Peale glistening over the fireplace.

"My, this is nice, Saul!" she exclaimed in a voice that made you think of a spinet tinkling in the candlelight. "We don't often see new faces. Yes, you go right upstairs. Cap'n Hawkins is waiting on you. If you don't mind, I'll keep at this pesky rug—I promised it to the Historical Society last winter, account they said I was the only one knew the Samoset pattern; but land's sake, it seems like I'll never finish hooking it."

Her smile, again, was a benediction, a caress to the spirit. Here was a woman who had never known fear or hatred, those twin evils which besmirch most of us. And a vague excitement stirred me, following Cap'n Saul upstairs. . . . We traversed a hall hung with ship-models and lined by cases of curios. At one end was a ship's wheel and binnacle, the brasswork polished to a glitter; and from behind a door in the southwest corner, a gruff voice hailed resonantly: "That you, Saul?"

"Aye-aye, sir," responded the whaleman, and ushered me into the presence of an enormous hulk of an old man, whose bony frame filled a comfortably shabby armchair beside a table strewn with books, between the two front windows. He laid down a volume as we entered, and bent upon me a pair of eyes as steely-blue as the waters of the harbor across Commerce Street. His hair was thick and silvery; and a square beard, neatly trimmed, fell to a jaunty bow-tie which set off his double-breasted blue suit. Give him a uniform cap, and he might have been sitting in his own cabin at sea.

"Who's your young friend?" he asked in his gruff tones.

CAP'N SAUL named me to him, and a twinkle glimmered in the cavernous eyes under their hoary thatch.

"Been wanting to see you, young feller!" he exclaimed. "Didn't know you came here." He pawed at the books on his table, and dragged forth my last novel. "Always read sea stories," he proceeded, "good, bad and indifferent. Yours are pretty good, but what in Tophet d'you mean by having your mainmast carry away in that storm and sweep the poop? Didn't you realize she'd have been caught by the mizzen's gear, if she had tumbled aft? Might have strained the mizzen loose, of course; but most likely she'd have pitched clean overside." He wagged a bony forefinger at me. "What you got to say to that, eh?"

"All I can say is that I'll ask you to read proof on my next yarn, sir," I answered.

It pleased him.

"If I'm here," he agreed. "Living on borrowed time, you know." Then he noticed the *Triton's* spike, which I had laid across my knee. "What's that? Looks like it might have come out of a clipper's garboard-strake."

I offered it to him, and he balanced it in his hand while Cap'n Saul recounted the saga of my treasure-hunt. His mirth was as hearty as a boy's.

"By Peter, that's good!" he roared. "I've known folks down-along who helped loot the *Triton*—after the surf was done with her. Not much of any account worth the taking, barring a few shillings in dead men's pockets." He frowned. "But I never heard yet of found money there wasn't trouble into; so it was just as well for the town, I guess."

"That puts me in mind," volunteered Cap'n Saul. "We were talkin' 'baout Soulouque's treasure. The young feller don't know the whole story, and him bein' a story-writer—"

"I'll bet he don't even know who Soulouque was," interjected Cap'n Hawkins.

His eyes, now, were far-away, and luminous with inward thought.

"No sir," I assented quickly, "whether man, woman or ship."

Cap'n Hawkins chuckled deep down in his throat.

"And Soulouque called himself Emperor!"

"Emperor of what?" I challenged.

"Of Haiti! And he *was* Emperor while he lasted. Don't you make any mistake about that! A black man, but he knew what it meant to be an emperor. By Peter, he was as much Emperor as Little Nap!"

"And it was his treasure—"

Cap'n Hawkins waved me to silence.

"You've heard this story, Saul," he said. "Go downstairs, and ask Miss Sally to break out a bottle of the Jamaica rum—we'll want a drop of toddy after I'm done. And shut the door behind you."

"Aye-aye, sir," the whaleman responded cheerfully.

And when he shut the door, it was as if the present had been barred from the sunny room. The past welled up around me, slow-moving and easy-going, yet with a vague suggestion of sudden happenings, and a brave thrust of energy. The sunlight became more golden, and I sensed the sheen of garish colors and the simple noises the world made before there were machines. Cap'n Hawkins' bearing took on an added dignity; he sat very straight, and his gaunt shoulders were momentarily flat as a board as he tugged at his beard—I could see him on his quarterdeck in long-tailed coat, with velvet collar and stock, speaking-trumpet in hand, eyes flitting restlessly from the towering piles of canvas overhead to the horizon's azure circle.

"The poor creature reeled away, cowering; but before he had taken three steps, Soulouque's saber swished out."

"I had the bark *Rowena*," he began. Did I say that his voice held that peculiar lingering quality which goes with a certain depth of timbre? "It was in '58, and times were bad—there'd been a panic in '57. We ran across with a slim cargo of Yankee knick-knacks, and in Liverpool the agent picked up a consignment of arms and munitions for the Haitians, discarded stuff the Limeys had left over from the Crimea—cannon, muskets, powder and ball, tents and bales of secondhand uniforms. It wasn't much, but it was something; and we figured we could stow enough coffee and sugar in at Port au Prince to ballast us into New York.

"Well, sir, we had a fair voyage, and opened La Selle peak on a fine clear morning in September. From offshore the place looked mighty nice—low houses, white and clean against the green of the gardens, and behind, the mountains lifting up to the clouds where the tradewind blew a sight heavier than it did down below with us. But when we beat in closer, you could see the dirt and squalor of it all, and the stench that eddied out in little gusts was fit to sicken you—like the bilge of a pest-ship, by Peter!

"I'd heard the natives were an insolent lot, so I had a bit of lagniappe ready for the port officer; but he was civil as you please after he found I talked his lingo and told him our cargo—said the Emperor was going to war with Santo Domingo, and they needed it pretty bad. He gave us pratique without so much as inspecting the crew, and I ordered the longboat overside to row me ashore to arrange for lighters.

"We could hear bugles blowing, and drums rattling, and twice there were smashes of musketry, quick and sharp, that sent cold chills up your spine. I don't scare easy, but I didn't care for the black scowls that met us at the wharf, and I heard a *'Sacré blanc!'* that wasn't too subdued. So I ordered the bow man to come with me — always a good scheme to have your back covered in a strange port.'' He paused, and his eyes hardened. ''Town boy, name of Tom Ellicott."

I wanted to ask him if this Tom Ellicott was any relation to Miss Sally, but there was something in his manner which made me hesitate; and before I could speak, he continued briskly:

"They weren't so brash as they seemed. *'Pardonne, m'sieurs!'* And they stepped back, all grins. *'Oui, M'sieu' Blanc.'* Oh, very polite! One of 'em guided us to the agent's—Frenchman, name of Bourassa, potty little feller, with mustaches like ox-horns. While we were talking, there was a burst of music outside, and a rattle of hoofs.

"'What's that?' I asked.

"'The Emperor,' answered Bourassa, 'returning from the executions.'

"I knew, then, why those smashes of musketry had made me shiver.

"'Who was executed?' I asked.

"'A *peloton* of mulattoes—for conspiracy.'

"'Well, so long as it wasn't white men!' I laughed. 'Let's go out in the street, and have a look at this fellow Soulouque."

"'*Mon Dieu!*' exclaimed the Frenchman. 'You mustn't speak so of His Majesty!' He looked over his shoulder to make sure the clerks in the counting-room hadn't heard. 'Faustin I, is his name, Monsieur le Capitaine, not Sou-

"'That's my last word. I'll shoot the first man who puts foot on the ladder.'"

louque. *That* was His Majesty's name before he was translated to the throne.'

"'All right,' I said. 'But let's have a look at him just the same.'

"So we went outside. And Tom Ellicott followed us. The street was crowded—black faces, chocolate faces, coffee faces, yellow faces; and coming toward us was a mounted band, big black bucks on white horses. The kettledrums were hung with aprons of leopard-skin; and on the trumpets were silken pennants embroidered in gold with imperial crowns. The musicians wore red uniforms, and white helmets with green horsehair plumes; and behind them rode a squadron of cuirassiers in white uniforms and silvered breastplates, and helmets with red horsehair plumes. And all of them were barefooted, except a group of officers, headed by the biggest and blackest fellow I ever saw. Instead of a plume, he had a silver eagle on his helmet, and the people ducked as he passed and called, *'Vive l'Empereur!'* like a parcel of school-children reciting for the district trustees.

"It was funny—and yet it was impressive. That black emperor stared down at the crowd as proud as Cæsar. His thick lips were clamped tight, and his jaw stuck out and every once in a while he raised his hand to salute, curt and grim, just as though he'd been born to it. I've seen Little Nap, with his Cent Gardes around him, and he wasn't more of an emperor than that black man.

"When they came opposite us, Soulouque noticed me—I was white, of course, and taller than anyone but him; and I couldn't keep from laughing at the bare feet and the silver cuirasses and helmets. He frowned, and turned to speak to an officer. And at the same moment Tom Ellicott hollered behind me, and a scrawny monkey of a mulatto dodged under my elbow into the road and leveled a horse-pistol at the Emperor. *'Vive la République!'* he yelled.

"I never stopped to think—just reached out and yanked him by the collar as he fired. The bullet went over Soulouque's head. And the next thing the cuirassiers were all about us, sabers whanging and people yowling, and Bourassa clinging to my other arm, bleating *mon Dieu's* as fast as he could find breath for 'em.

"I hung onto the mulatto, and told Tom Ellicott to put up his knife; but we'd have had our heads bashed in if Soulouque himself hadn't come charging through the muss.

"'Fools,' he shouted, 'this white has the assassin!' And to me: 'Let him free.' I obeyed, and the poor creature reeled away, cowering; but before he had taken three steps, Soulouque's saber swished out, and his head leaped up from the neck. *'Bien!'* said Soulouque. There wasn't any gusto in his manner—only the satisfaction of a man who'd done a necessary job. He handed the saber to an officer to clean, and considered me with a curiosity that wasn't exactly friendly—or exactly hostile either.

"'You are the white who laughed at me,' he said.

"'I am the white who saved your life,' I answered.

"Bourassa started to explain who I was, but the Emperor shut him off with an oath.

"'You laughed at me,' he repeated.

"The crowd had dispersed, and a circle of cuirassiers sat their horses around us, silently watchful—the officer who had Soulouque's sword was wiping it on his horse's mane. And that black emperor was staring at me kind of anxiously; there was a queer, puzzled look in his yellow eyes.

"'It was the bare feet,' I said.

"He nodded slowly.

"'The boots hurt them, and they haven't the pride to stand the pain.' His lips parted in a snarl. 'But they will learn to from today.' He extended his hand for the sword the officer had wiped clean, and I thought he was going to begin lopping heads again. So did his own people—ever see a darky's face go gray? But he slapped the sword into the sheath with an angry clang. 'You hear me, *cochons?* From today—boots! You are the Guard of the Emperor of Haiti, and it is for you to set an example to the soldiers of the Line. This white did right to laugh at you.'

"It was—appealing, you might say. Childish, yes. But mighty appealing. The feller wanted to learn. He wanted his people to learn. He was pretty close to a savage; but by Peter, he was an emperor!

"He leaned forward in his saddle, and offered me his horny, calloused hand, a laborer's hand. There was a stain of blood on the cuff of his white sleeve.

"'You are an honest man,' he said, 'and you speak French; but you are not a Frenchman.'

"'I'm an American sailor,' I told him. 'I speak many languages.' And then I added: 'I speak Swahili.'

"'What is that?' he asked simply.

"'An African tongue.'

"'African? You speak African? A white who speaks African! By the Snake, you are almost as good as a negro!' A cunning expression crept into his broad features. 'There is luck in this for both of us. I think you have been sent to me for a purpose. Did you say you were a sailor?'

"Before I had a chance to answer, Bourassa stood into the talk with every sail drawing; and this time Soulouque let him get weigh on—until he told how I'd fetched in the *Rowena* with the munitions from England. Then the Emperor grinned all over his black face.

"'I knew it,' he cried. 'The American brings luck to me. No, that's enough from you, Frenchman. *Assez!* Deliver the cargo to the Quartier-Général not later than the end of the week. If you need men or boats, go to Prince Bobo, the Chancellor, and he will secure them for you. If you delay—*zut!* There's always a firing-squad on duty at the *caserne.*'

"He winked at me as Bourassa scuttled for cover. 'Too much hair doesn't become a little face,' he quoted. 'We sha'n't need an agent for the cargo I have in mind for you, M'sieur l'Américain. Ride with me to the Palace, and we'll talk it over.'

"The feller never doubted I'd come, d'you see? He just beckoned up the officer who'd wiped his sword, and introduced him—'This is my Chamberlain, M'sieur le Duc de Limonade.' And kind of aside: 'An old creation—his grandfather was of King Christophe's peerage.'

"The Chamberlain bowed politely to me, and Soulouque said: 'Have the kindness, M'sieur le Duc, to dismount two troopers for the white gentleman and his servant.' So there were Tom Ellicott and I, riding through the streets of Port au Prince with a black emperor and a whole parcel of black dukes and barons, kettledrums thumping, and trumpets braying, and the people who hadn't been sabered in the rumpus over the mulatto bobbing up and down and shouting *'Vive l'Empereur!'* like so many children afraid of being spanked."

Cap'n Hawkins chuckled dryly.

"If there'd been somebody there to see us!" And then his eyes hardened as they had once before, and he hastened on as though he were trying to forget something: "The Palace was a wooden building, maybe two-three hundred feet long and one story high, set in a tangle of gardens run wild, with a battered iron fence around it. The paint was crumbling off the walls, and there were holes in the roof, and some of the jalousies were broken. Inside, it was the same: the thick carpets and the gold-laced curtains were stained and torn; the gilded furniture was scratched and rickety; the pictures of black generals on the walls were wabbly in their frames; the crystal chandeliers were chipped and foul with candle-grease. In a couple of places there were bullet-holes in the plaster. And a sentry stood outside every door. And nowhere a flower. It gave you the creeps.

"SOULOUQUE took us first into a state dining-room as big as a meeting-house, with a table to seat fifty running down the center. He clapped his hands, and a black flunky pattered in barefooted, buttoning a red livery-coat over dirty white cotton pants. Soulouque told him to feed Tom Ellicott, and bring champagne to the throne-room—'And be quick, you lazy son, or I'll have Père Liouar put a spell on your eyes that'll keep you from sleeping, day or night.' You should have seen that flunky run! I had to laugh—even while I was bidding Tom watch himself and keep out of trouble."

The old man sighed, and I asked if he was getting tired.

"No, no! Just—thinking. Shouldn't have left the boy, I guess—shouldn't have brought him along. Too much for a young feller: the gold and silver plate, the goblets and flagons and pitchers, the flat stuff scattered everywhere. Loot of a hundred plantations, I've been told."

"Do you mean this Tom Ellicott was light-fingered?" I interrupted.

"No, I wouldn't say that. Honest a boy as ever stepped, probably. Wrong-headed, that's all. But you'll see. . . . Humph, where was I? Oh, yes! Well sir, that throne-room made the dining-room look like a dog-kennel: gilt mirrors along the walls from floor to ceiling, rows of spindly gilt chairs under 'em, and at one end a platform with two thrones, purple-plush and gold, one larger than the other, and over 'em a red-and-blue canopy of fringed silk and velvet. Between the thrones was a gilt table, and on that were a crown and a scepter that sparkled with jewels.

"Soulouque snatched up one of the spindly chairs and planked it down by the table.

"'Sit, M'sieur l'Américain,' he said. And he flung himself into the largest throne. His spurs ripped a hole in the carpet, but he never noticed it. He was studying a reflection of himself in a mirror, and presently he took off his eagle-crested helmet and put the crown on his head. 'Handsome, isn't it?' he asked me. 'I paid nine hundred thousand francs for the regalia in Paris. You should see me in my robes—the Archbishop doesn't look so fine.'

"I told him I thought it must be a warm costume, and he nodded gravely: 'But yes. An obligation of rank.' His yellow eyes scrutinized me as they had in the street. 'You do not call me Majesty,' he said.

"'I'm an American,' I reminded him. 'We don't recognize emperors and kings, white or black.'

"'I could see you intended no disrespect,' he assented. *'You* don't look at me like the whites who think negroes should be slaves.'

"At that moment the flunky sidled in, carrying a tin tray that held two golden flagons of wine. He set it down on the table at my elbow, picked up one of the flagons, took a sip and handed it to the Emperor. 'The white's too,' said Soulouque. And the flunky bobbed his head, sampled the second flagon and offered it to me! 'One never knows,' explained Soulouque. He buried his thick lips in the foam, and I gulped a mouthful to keep him company. The bare feet of the flunky went *slap-slap* out

the door, and suddenly I sensed that Soulouque was staring at me again. 'I have need of an honest man,' he said. 'I shall be marching against the Santo Domingans in a few weeks. *Cochons!* Mulattoes! But as the saying goes, jiggers never respect the feet of gentry.' He took off the crown and spun it on his huge forefinger. 'In fine, there is a treasure of four million francs gold I wish conveyed to Kingston. I will pay well for the satisfaction of knowing it goes in safe hands.'

"I thought fast. Four million francs was two hundred thousand Napoleons, eight hundred thousand dollars. That much coin could stow easily in the lazarette. It was no voyage at all from Haiti to Jamaica, and there'd be at least as good a chance of picking up a cargo for home in Kingston as in Port au Prince.

"'My owners would expect me to charge twenty-five thousand francs for such a commission,' I said.

"He tossed the crown onto the table with a gesture of disgust—I caught it before it could roll on the floor.

"'What do I care for your owners?' he growled. 'It is you I trust, and I pay. Give them what you choose.'

"'But I am their officer,' I said. 'I am in their employ.'

"'*Zut!* What do I care?' he repeated. 'How much did you say they will want? Twenty-five thousand francs? *Bien!* I will give you a letter to M'sieur Arbuthnot, the banker in Kingston. When you deliver him my gold, he will pay over to you twenty-five thousand francs for your owners, and one hundred thousand francs for yourself.'

"'But it isn't necessary,' I said. 'We shall be well paid at twenty-five thousand francs.'

"Soulouque's yellow eyes twinkled shrewdly.

"'It isn't your owners I must rely upon to see my gold safe,' he said. 'And while you are an honest man, M'sieur l'Américain, I think you will be more interested in serving me if you have so much at stake.'"

CAP'N HAWKINS broke off as the door of the room opened, and Cap'n Saul entered, balancing a tray of toddies with great care.

"Most finished?" inquired the whaleman.

"Pretty nigh, Saul, and I'll be mighty glad to wet my whistle. What say, sir? It's been as dry work listening as talking, I guess."

"Not by a stack of toddies," I dissented, and sniffed delightedly the mingled perfume of mint and lemon-peel and prime old rum. "And what happened next?" I prompted.

"Why, we drove back to the wharf in the Emperor's coach, Tom Ellicott and I, and that night Soulouque sent the treasure aboard." He sighed heavily, and for the first time I was fully conscious of his age.

"In the morning I could see the crew were wrong. No mistake. Lazy, sullen, furtive—it was like poison to 'em, that gold in the lazarette, like the mist off a fever-swamp." He drained the balance of his glass.

"Well sir, we got away the fifth day, and as we stood out for the Gonaive Channel, I heard kettledrums thumping and trumpets braying, and I looked astern over the taffrail; and there was Soulouque, sitting his horse at the head of his cuirassiers on the *embarcadère*, the eagle on his helmet shining in the sunlight."

"What became of him?" I asked.

"The mulattoes and Santo Domingans were too strong for him. He followed his gold to Kingston within six months of that day."

"So you did save the treasure!"

"Belay there," Cap'n Hawkins remonstrated. "Don't throw me off my course. It's not easy telling, even now.

"It was off Dame Marie. . . . They came aft peaceful enough, offered to put me and the mates overside in the longboat. . . . Tom Ellicott—" The old voice had lost its resonance, but the gaunt face was rigid as granite. "Tom Ellicott, he told 'em I'd get it all, if they didn't take it first. 'And if it hadn't been for me,' he said, 'the Cap'n wouldn't have grabbed that mulatto, and the gold wouldn't be aboard. It's ours more'n it is his. Come on, you swabs! There'll be plenty to share around. We'll sink the ship, and row into Panama, and then every man for himself. But we'll never have to work again.'

"I saw he had 'em roused out of their wits, but I tried to stop it. 'Why, you damn' fools,' I said, 'don't you know this is piracy, let alone mutiny? And it isn't my gold. It belongs to the Emperor of Haiti. All that I stand to get out of the gold,' I told 'em, 'is a commission of a hundred thousand francs Soulouque promised me over the owners' charges. I meant to divide that with the lot of you, prize-money rules, same as in privateering; and if you'll back water now, I'll forget what's happened, and each of you shall have his share—except Ellicott. But that's my last word. I'll shoot the first man who puts his foot on the poop ladder.'

"Some of 'em started to waver, and Tom Ellicott yelled not to believe me: 'He's afraid to shoot! And what's a hundred thousand francs, when there's millions in the lazarette?'

"I could see it coming, the way their feet shuffled, and all of a sudden—"

The old voice trailed off into silence. . . . "Afterward they were scared," he continued presently. "I made each one of 'em step up and look into his face, and told 'em it was *they* had put him in the shroud that Sails was sewing fast." The steely eyes were a little dim as they focused on me. "But that wasn't quite true. Soulouque's treasure had done it. By Peter, I wished I hadn't trafficked with it! It wasn't earned money, d'you see? It was the same as found—and there's always trouble into found money."

There was a pause.

"That's the story," he said flatly. "Mind if I keep your spike? It has the feel of the old days." . . .

As I followed Cap'n Saul out the door, he was holding the *Triton's* spike in his hand and staring absentmindedly across the empty harbor.

DOWNSTAIRS, Miss Sally fluttered to meet us, blushing prettily when I begged her for the recipe of her toddy; but it was all I could do to keep my curiosity under control until the front door closed upon us.

"Tom Ellicott," I said, "what was he to her?"

"Brother," returned Cap'n Saul. "Had you guessin', eh? Of course, she wasn't more'n a little gal when Tom died; but years later Cap'n Hawkins met her and they started keepin' company together. Then Tom's father, old Barach Ellicott, heard what was up and forbid her havin' any truck with Cap'n Hawkins. Very bitter, old Barach was—called the Cap'n Tom's murderer—wanted to have him tried in the Admiralty Court to Boston."

"But—" I nodded helplessly toward the white house.

"Oh, 'baout ten year' ago, after Cap'n Hawkins began to be took feeble, Miss Sally come to see him. 'Isaac,' she said, 'when my father was on his deathbed, he told me he couldn't pass on in grace without I promised him never to marry you or keep company with you; and seein' as the Good Book tells us to honor our parents, I promised. But I guess no one can say now there's any call of the flesh between us two, and the Lord knows we've suffered enough for what wasn't the fault of either of us; so if you're willin', I'll move in and keep house for you.'"

Cap'n Saul chuckled unctuously.

"And I don't know but what that was the richest treasure Cap'n Hawkins ever found," he concluded.

"Listen, you guys," said Marfesso. "I want you to get this straight."

Wherein Messrs. Suddaby and Jipp, salesmen extraordinary, bring terror to the heart of a racketeer and his "torpedo" —a joyous comedy by the author of "Half a Horse."

By

M. BOWMAN HOWELL

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

Sweet Racket

WHEN Samuel Suddaby and his partner, Mr. Wilmer Jipp, saw fit to stride the public pavements, Mr. Suddaby invariably walked a few feet in advance. This action was not the result of any snobbery on his part. It was merely habit, acquired after fifteen years of selling with Jipp.

For Suddaby was the "glad-hander" of the combine. It was his six feet of beef, bluff and burning enthusiasm that consistently smashed initial sales-resistance and opened the marts of trade to Jipp's smooth completion of a sale.

The cadaverous Jipp was, apparently, content with this arrangement. His thin shanks never hurried to lessen the distance separating him from Suddaby. As "closer" of the team, he was a model of reticence until his partner had paved the prospect's path to purchase.

Jipp had an honest face. It was the pessimistic sort. When Jipp predicted a "bull" market, prospects believed in "bull" markets. His countenance was not an indicator of undue optimism. Jipp had sold this, that and the other when salesmen were "drummers," and gossip was the cold canvass that held the ear of every prospect. So had Suddaby, albeit his cold canvass had always consisted of a hearty thump on the back, a, "Howdy, Doc!" and a répertoire of "smoker" wheezes that would last, unrepeated, from Los Angeles to Buffalo.

The partners were followers of the rackets. They had sold oil-stock when that profitable field was at its oiliest. Their mining-stock activities had resulted in returns (to Jipp and Suddaby) that were comparable to the dividends of the Comstock Lode. In the real-estate game, they had given away (for a small fee to cover assessments, title, and so forth) thousands of acres of property in Nevada, Arizona and California—desert property from which industrious jackrabbits fled, to hustle their three squares a day.

But the partners were the improvident sort. Their philosophy embraced the principle of "come easy, go easy." It was the "go easy" principle that was responsible for Suddaby's present perusal of the classified ads in his morning paper.

Suddaby read as he hurried along Mineola's Main Street, a few feet in advance of Jipp. He already had separated the wheat from the chaff and was concentrating on a particular advertisement. It read:

> SALESMEN—
> "I GOT SUMPIN"
> ITALIA-VINE-JU—The pure juice of California wine grapes. Port, Sherry, Burgundy and many other flavors. Now is the time for the holiday trade. Here is the chance to make quick money for HOLIDAY JUICE. See Mr. Wiley. ITALIA-VINE-JU Corp. Fedd Bldg.

"Jipp," said Suddaby, turning into the Fedd Building, "this should be a sweet racket."

"There aint," replied Jipp, "any sweet rackets."

"Where there's smoke, there's fire," quoted Suddaby; "and the papers have been smoking this grape concentrate business."

"People get burned playing with fire."

Suddaby turned on his partner. "What's the matter with you? We got to work, haven't we?"

Jipp nodded doleful agreement. "But I don't have to like it," he said.

"Well, don't tell this guy Wiley so."

In the outer office of the Italia-Vine-Ju Corporation, Mr. Clyde Wiley was contemplating the profits and possibilities in prohibition and grape concentrate. In the

Blinky trained a gun on each man. "Shall I burn 'em, boss?" he asked.

salesroom, Mr. Wiley's brother and partner, Mr. Wiley, was conducting an organization meeting.

As president of the newly founded company, Mr. Clyde Wiley met and interviewed prospective salesmen. His duty was to convince job-seekers of the untold opportunities awaiting them in the grape-concentrate field. (On a strictly commission basis.)

He accomplished this in two ways. First: By means of a heart-to-heart talk—in which Mr. Wiley confidentially disclosed the enormous profits which he had earned yesterday during a few moments of his spare time. Second: by suggestion—which meant Mr. Wiley's very natty clothing, his vest pocket full of twenty-five-cent cigars, his excessively large but slightly flawed diamond, and an office furnished in mahogany.

This front and flourish, however, represented time and money wasted to Suddaby, who entered with a rush, the ever-lagging Jipp at his heels.

"Howdy," said Suddaby. "I'm looking for Mr. Wiley."

"And at him," answered Wiley.

"We're your new salesmen," stated Suddaby.

"Our commission," said Wiley, "is fifty per cent of the gross."

"What," asked Suddaby, "is the minimum order?"

"Twenty-five dollars."

"'I sometimes wonder what the vintners buy, one-half so precious as the stuff they sell,'" quoted Suddaby.

"My brother," said Wiley, "is holding a sales-meeting in the next room. Step in and help yourself to some new angles."

"There aint," muttered Jipp, "any new angles."

"What's that?"

"He said we'll ankle in," interjected Suddaby, casting a warning glance at his partner.

The sales-room was crowded. A haze of smoke hung in the air. Through the haze, Jipp and Suddaby glimpsed a speaker performing on a platform at the end of the room. The partners selected seats nearest the door and most distant from the disturbance.

"Our company," shouted the speaker, "has been founded in the State for more than fifty years. Prior to prohibition we made the palatable wines for which the public still longs. Since Prohibition, we have been engaged in the manufacture of—"

Suddaby turned indignantly to his partner. "That egg," he said, "is telling us how to make a cold canvass."

"He's not telling me," replied Jipp, slumping in his chair.

"I thought they were going to give us some new angles."

"There aint," reaffirmed Jipp with satisfaction, "any new angles."

Jipp's hands dug deep into his trouser pockets. Slowly he withdrew one and exposed its contents to his partner's gaze. It contained three dimes and a nickel.

There was a responsive gleam in Suddaby's eye. He also dug into his pockets and produced a number of coins. His right hand chose a nickel and flipped it into the air. He caught it deftly and turned it on the back of his left hand.

Jipp did likewise. They uncovered the coins simultaneously. After due consideration of the results, Jipp solemnly appropriated Suddaby's nickel. Again they flipped coins. The partners were oblivious of the shrieking from the platform.

"The balance of these juices are blended into thirteen different kinds of wines which are obtainable for your use, and the possession of which is lawful—"

The man had shed his coat. His tie was draped over the speaker's table at his side.

"That will give you," he shouted, "at least an eighteen-

per-cent wine, which is within one half of one per cent of what Burgundy wines are now testing in the wine-cellars of France! Think of that!"

Suddaby thought of it, sighed, and flipped another nickel. He glanced at the head on the coin and reached for Jipp's money. Jipp was reaching for Suddaby's nickel.

"What're you doin'?" muttered Suddaby. "I was matchin' you."

"I was matching you," corrected Jipp.

"You're out of your head."

"And in a nickel."

"Not mine," stated Suddaby, pocketing his coin.

"Tinhorn!"

"Cheap!" replied Suddaby venomously.

The partners glowered at each other. Suddaby sulked, and Jipp grumbled. The voice of the speaker bellowed on:

"We can give you the same quality Burgundy juice fortified with five per cent Zinfendel brandy which is blended in the wine-juice just before it leaves the vineyard and after the fermentation is started. The only additional cost is—"

A FEW hours after Suddaby and Jipp engaged in their little tiff, a sales-meeting of a different character was called to order over the Pug McGinnis Pool Parlors on the East Side. The speaker at this latter meeting was none other than Antonio Marfesso, gangster, racketeer and dispenser of the beverages known as the real McCoy.

The salesmen at this meeting were a small but select group. All were of extremely high-pressure caliber. Their methods were sometimes strenuous, but after all, exceedingly convincing.

Marfesso's salesmen sold service—protective service. They represented such sound financial institutions as the Dry Cleaners' Protective Association, and the Automobile Dealers' Preservation Corporation. Members of these organizations were protected from machine-gun ambush, pineapples and acts of God.

Marfesso's meetings were never called to order. Automatic attention followed Marfesso's entry into the room. This entry usually ruined from one to three good poker-hands and a crap-game. Holding four aces pat, a certain Knife-eye Murphy had once been tardy in throwing down his hand when Marfesso entered the room. . . The flowers alone were supposed to have cost three grand.

Today, Marfesso was in a hurry. In his pocket was a bracelet that had cost twice as much as the flowers for Knife-eye. In his residence on the West Side waited a "Dizzy-dizzy" that already had cost twice as much as the bracelet. Marfesso was in a hurry.

From his position near the door he eyed his henchmen with a murderous scowl. Behind him lounged his rod-men, their hands carelessly thrust in their pockets, and carelessly fingering the triggers of stubby revolvers.

"Listen, you guys," said Marfesso. "I only got a minute, and I want you to get this straight." He paused a moment for emphasis. "The beer racket has been fallin' off somethin' fierce the last coupla months. We figure it's because these wine-grape salesmen are musclin' in on us. So today we're organizin' the Wine Grape Salesmen's Protective Association. Limpy, here, has got the line-up of the companies that are chiselin' in. We want five bucks a week out of every salesman on the road. This racket ought to be good for an easy grand a week. Limpy'll give you guys your territories. Now get busy!"

Marfesso backed through the door. "Come on, Blinky," he snarled at one of the gunmen.

A few minutes later, in the hallway of his residence, Marfesso assumed his most sinless "lady-killer" smile. He removed his overcoat and stepped through the door of the living-room. The lady-killer smile melted to the same smile—without the "lady." Two strangers sat in the Marfesso living-room, conversing with the Dizzy-dizzy!

Now, by reason of his profession, Marfesso was suspicious of all men—especially strangers! "On the spot!" flashed into his mind even as a revolver flashed into his hand! The gun wavered menacingly between the two men.

Marfesso snarled in earnest. It was a snarl that would have brought tears of vexation and envy from a lobo wolf with a touch of hydrophobia.

"What're you rats doin' here?"

Suddaby instantly calculated the distance from his seat to the nearest window. He decided to die sitting down. Jipp wondered if the sixty dollars in his pocket would save him from a pauper's grave. He glanced appealingly at the Dizzy-dizzy. Both men were in a state of activity extremely like the Sphinx of Egypt.

Marfesso's snarl brought Blinky crashing through the door, a cannon (or so it seemed to Jipp and Suddaby) in each hand.

Blinky instantly trained a gun on each man. "Shall I burn 'em, boss?" he asked in his own very fair imitation of the lobo. "Shall I burn 'em?"

"Tony!" shrieked the Dizzy-dizzy, saving Suddaby from a natural death by heart-failure. "You got 'em wrong. They're just a couple of grape-juice salesmen who came to the door. I was lonesome, so I let them in. I just bought a little Sauterne, and they've been waiting for you to come in and pay them." She turned to Jipp and Suddaby. "You'll pardon my husband, I hope. He's an officer and has been working on the big Marfesso-gang case. Naturally he's a little nervous. They've had him on the spot for weeks. But you needn't worry about his being a policeman. He likes a little wine with his meals."

Marfesso blinked with amazement, then grinned and slid the artillery back into the arsenal. "Yeah, that's right," he said. "Put it away, Blinky."

Blinky obeyed reluctantly. "Sure you don't want 'em burnt?" he whispered wistfully.

As the guns disappeared, Jipp and Suddaby heaved simultaneous sighs of relief.

"Sorry we frightened you," ventured Jipp nervously.

"What's that?" Marfesso asked in astonishment.

"He said 'you frightened us for a moment,'" Suddaby replied hurriedly. He was thinking of the recent sale for which the check was still due. Best not to irritate the customer with any reflections on his character.

"Sorry," said Marfesso shortly, adjusting his shoulder holster. "How's business?"

"Terrible. The beer-barons are getting all the trade. This Marfesso you're after is the worst of the lot. I hope you get him, and get him good."

THE gangster smiled suavely at his guests. Blinky leaned over and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Can I burn 'em, boss?" he asked hopefully. "Le' me burn 'em."

"You beat it into the library. I'll handle this," was Marfesso's sibilant reply.

After Blinky had left, Marfesso seated himself comfortably. He lit a cigar.

"So you don't think much of this Marfesso," he said.

"He's a rat," said Suddably stoutly.

"And a bully," added Jipp.

"A dirty, sneaking coward," continued Suddaby. "I'd like to give him a piece of my mind. He'd never intimidate me the way he does the rest of the people in this town. He ought to be tarred and feathered."

"And ridden out of town on a rail," assisted Jipp.

"Tee-hee!" snickered the Dizzy-dizzy.

Marfesso scowled at her. "What're you laughin' at? These men are right."

The Dizzy-dizzy lapsed into silence.

"Of course we're right," continued Suddaby, encouraged by this squelching of the mocker. "The man is rotten to the core. He's a menace to the human race, the freedom of the ballot-box and the sanctity of the American home! He ought to be hung!"

"Hanging," said Jipp, "is too good for him."

"Well, there doesn't seem to be much we can do about it. If you men will step into the library, I'll write you out a check for the Sauterne."

Marfesso rose and led the way down the hall. In the library, Blinky met him before the salesmen entered the room.

"When these saps come in, you lock the door," the gangster said hurriedly. "I'm going to find out what their game is."

He crossed the room and seated himself behind a huge desk. Suddaby and Jipp stood in the doorway.

"Come in and take a seat."

The salesmen entered. Blinky shut the door. As Suddaby and Jipp sat, there was an ominous click from the lock behind their backs. Jipp wriggled uneasily in his seat.

"I think I'll wait outside. I feel a little faint," he said.

He rose hesitantly. But there was no hesitation about the way he resumed his seat. For out of the arsenal had come the artillery!

"Sit down!" thundered Marfesso.

Suddaby's complexion became a study in pale saffron. His normal heart beat of seventy-two dropped to zero, did a double flip and settled down to a steady one hundred and sixty. Jipp went into his impersonation of the Sphinx. From behind the pair came the eager voice of Blinky.

"Shall I burn 'em, boss? Le' me burn 'em!"

Suddaby's heart jumped to an all-time record of one-sixty-seven.

"Shut up, Blinky, or I'll burn *you!*"

Blinky shut up. The Suddaby pump dropped to a mere one-forty. The Suddaby tongue licked the dry Suddaby lips. The lips uttered three sickly squeaks. They were intended to mean, "What's the idea?" But actually they meant nothing.

"Now, let's cut out this funny business! You saps know I'm Marfesso! What's your game?"

There was a feeble moan from Suddaby. Jipp swayed like the grasses in a gale.

"Quit stallin'. Or will I have to have Blinky operate on you to make you talk?"

Suddaby strangled and emitted another series of squeaks. Jipp's lips moved, but no sound came forth.

"Frisk 'em, Blinky!"

Blinky frisked. With the dexterity of long practice he searched Suddaby and Jipp. His hands passed quickly over their outer clothing in a search for weapons. Then he rifled their pockets. Wallets, watches and papers were passed across the desk to Marfesso.

"Keep 'em covered!"

MARFESSO rapidly scanned the papers before him. They contained nothing but personal mail, and papers relative to the grape-concentrate business. He threw them from him disgustedly.

This interval of inspection had given Suddaby's complexion and heart action a chance to return to a state compatible with human speech. "We're only grape-juice salesmen," he ventured timidly. "You see—"

"Saps!" Marfesso ejaculated.

Suddaby did a fish-out-of-water impersonation of his own.

"Do you guys belong to the Wine Grape Salesmen's Protective Association?" demanded Marfesso.

"We d-d-don't," stuttered Suddaby. "B-b-but we'd be only t-t-too happy—"

"Pick up your junk." Marfesso indicated the personal possessions on the desk. "Not that you'll need 'em where you're goin'," he added darkly.

"Can I take 'em for a ride, boss?" asked Blinky. "Le' me take 'em for a ride."

"Not yet, Blinky. Not yet. I got a better idea."

Blinky sighed.

"We'll hold these saps for about a week. Then if these grape-juice outfits don't fall in line, we'll send one of 'em back layin' down. It'll give 'em an idea we aint foolin'. If things don't pick up then, we'll send the other one along. But we'll give you boys a mighty nice send-off." Marfesso smiled in the direction of his captives.

"Gee, boss, you sure are smart. Maybe I'll get to burn 'em after all."

"I'll phone one of the boys to come over and get 'em," said Marfesso, rising. "You watch the door, Blinky; and if these guys get funny, let 'em have it."

BLINKY followed his chief into the hallway. The door closed on the silent salesmen. Suddaby was the first to regain speech.

"The windows," he said, "got bars on 'em."

"You're not tellin' me," replied Jipp weakly. A trembling hand wiped his wet forehead.

"Look," said Suddaby, "what you got us into."

"I got us into? What you mean? Whose idea was it to go into this grape-concentrate racket? You got us in this mess, and you better think of some way to get us out—and in a hurry!"

"But what'll we do?"

"Think and figure, if you know how. I've already figured that if we don't get out of this, your corpse is going to act as the first horrible example. Maybe after it's on display, Marfesso won't need another."

"Me! First? How do you get that way? Why should I be the fall guy? Who do you think you are?"

"I'm the first one to think of it."

"Maybe I thought of it but was too much of a gentleman to suggest such a thing."

"Then you keep on being a gentleman. That suits me."

"We're wasting time. We got to think of something to get us both out."

Jipp nodded.

"That's sensible," he said. "Concentrate!"

Jipp proceeded to follow his own suggestion by lighting a cigarette and puffing furiously. Suddaby rose and paced restlessly back and forth. He whacked the palm of his left hand with his right fist. He opened his collar. He rumpled his hair. It was a whisper from Jipp that brought these erratic actions to a halt.

"I got it!"

"What?"

"A recipe for cooking the gangster's goose. We may not get away with it, but it's worth a try. Listen to this."

Suddaby and Jipp put their heads together for a whispered conference. After a few seconds they drew apart. They tiptoed across the room to the door. Suddaby was the first to speak. His voice was loud. It easily reached the ears of Blinky, standing guard in the hallway.

"I tell you," said Suddaby, "the boys should be here with a warrant for his arrest at any moment. He'll laugh on the other side of his face then."

Blinky moved closer to the other side of the door.

"We wouldn't be in this mess if we'd brought our guns," said Jipp. "Believe me, I'm off these investigation cases. We might have been bumped off before the boys got here."

"Oh, we're safe enough. Even this Marfesso wouldn't be such a fool as to put us on the spot. The way it is, all we have on him is evasion of the income-tax. He's too smart to add murder to his troubles at a time like this."

At the other side of the door Blinky listened intently. With the mention of income-tax, a lump formed in his throat. He pressed an ear to the keyhole.

"I guess you're right," came the voice of Jipp. "None of these big shots would take a chance like that."

"Did you see where they gave Al Cerroni ten years for evading the tax?" Suddaby's forced laugh rang in Blinky's ear. "A couple of his gunmen got five years apiece."

Blinky swallowed nervously. His eyes goggled.

"We've got enough on Marfesso to put him away for twice that long," said Jipp.

Blinky rose from his kneeling position beside the door. He backed silently down the hall to the living-room. With eyes focused on his vacated post, he called into the living-room from the corner of his mouth.

"Hey, boss!"

"What do you want now?"

"Them two guys I'm watchin' is Feds!"

"What!"

"Honest, boss! I heard 'em talkin' through the door. They been gettin' evidence to pin it on you fer beatin' the income-tax. Somebody's on the way here now to put the pinch on you!"

"Marfesso and that homicide squad are on the train!"

Marfesso leaped into view. He crashed into Blinky. Both hit the deck.

"Why don't you watch what you're doin'?"

Blinky scrambled to his feet apologetically. "Couldn't help it, boss. Them guys is gettin' on me nerves. Why, I heard one of 'em say that Al Cerroni got ten years, just yesterday."

Marfesso glared at him.

"Don't I know that? I been lookin' out for this! That's why I figured those guys phony."

"What're we goin' to do, boss?"

"What do you suppose? We're goin' to get out o' town till this blows over. Watch that door while I get a few rags together. We'll keep under cover till tonight, and then grab a train out!"

"What about the rest of the boys?"

"They'll be all right. I'm the guy the flatfeet are lookin' for. Can the chatter and keep your eye on that door. Be back in a jiffy."

Marfesso turned back to the living-room.

"Hey, Goldilocks," he said, "better bundle up and blow. The coppers are lookin' for me. So Blinky and I are goin' to take a little vacation."

Exactly nine seconds later the front door closed behind the Dizzy-dizzy. In another two minutes Marfesso stood in the hallway with a suitcase in each hand.

"Lock that door," he said indicating the library entrance.

"It's locked."

"Let's go!"

In the library Suddaby and Jipp sat silently, straining their ears. There had been no sound outside the door for more than an hour. Jipp was the first to speak.

"I wonder," he whispered, "if they've gone?"

"Let's rap on the door," suggested Suddaby.

"All right. Go ahead and rap."

"You rap."

"*You* rap."

"You're not afraid, are you?" Suddaby asked.

"Yep."

This frankness on the part of Jipp was a bit disconcerting. Suddaby gulped a gulp and wondered who was going to do the rapping.

"Guns shoot through doors," continued Jipp nervously. "But if you're not afraid, go ahead and rap."

"We might," suggested Suddaby, tactfully evading the issue, "throw something from this side of the room."

"That's a good idea. Throw something."

"You throw it."

"You're not afraid, are you?"

"Yep," answered Suddaby, resorting to the Jipp tactics.

"Suppose we both throw it?"

"We better do that," agreed Suddaby. He picked up the smallest ash-tray in the room. "Let's throw this."

"It's too small for both of us to throw. You throw it, and I'll take half the blame."

"Nothing doing. We'll both throw it."

They both threw it.

It flew through the air and hit the door, fell to the floor and rolled noisily to a halt. Silence again settled on the house.

"Hey, Blinky," shouted Suddaby.

There was no answer.

"Let's throw this," said Jipp, picking up a smoking-stand.

The stand followed in the path of the ash-tray. But the crash of this latter bit of furniture was a racket of the first water. The sound reverberated through the building. Again complete silence. . . .

It was five minutes of six when Jipp and Suddaby let themselves out the front door of the house. Behind them, a mangled library door hung brokenly on one hinge. Three chairs and a desk in similar stages of destruction were scattered about the hallway at their backs.

Red-faced and puffing, Suddaby led the way. For the first time in the history of the Suddaby-Jipp combine, Jipp did not linger behind his partner. He pressed hotly on the heels of Suddaby.

"How much money you got?" wheezed Suddaby.

"A little over fifty dollars."

"I've got about the same. And we're going to use part of it to get out of town. When Marfesso finds out who we are, our lives won't be worth a cent. I don't ever want to bump into that yegg again."

"Me either," agreed Jipp, looking back with agitation before prodding his partner to a smarter gait. . . .

The Empire Limited, northbound, leaves Mineola at fifteen minutes after six. It was exactly fourteen minutes after the hour when Suddaby and Jipp scrambled aboard. The partners had packed and tracked in record time.

THE strain of those moments had taken their toll. Suddaby's pace had been reduced to a stagger. Jipp wavered weakly behind. The partners panted. They blew. They perspired.

"Well," gasped Suddaby, collapsing into the nearest vacant seat, "we made it."

Jipp flat-tired on the seat across the aisle. He wheezed like a carburetor in a fog. He looked disgustedly at Suddaby. It was a look that placed that gentleman in a class with lepers, lawbreakers and loons.

"And—this—is—your—idea—of—a—sweet—racket," he groaned.

Suddaby was too exhausted to protest. But he tried. He gurgled, strangled for air and decided to take it like a man.

But the injustice of it—that was the thing that cut! To think of Jipp turning on him like this!

Fifteen miles later Suddaby broke the silence. His animosity of a few minutes before was completely forgotten.

"I'm going back to the smoker and see if I can wangle a little stimulant for my heart."

"What you need," grumbled Jipp, "is something to stimulate a weak brain."

Suddaby ignored this bit of sarcasm. It was, he felt, best to let Jipp sulk it off. In the meantime, the smoker was the place to find more congenial companionship.

At this same time, exactly the same idea had struck the vacation-bound Marfesso, seated in the observation car of the same train. Lighting a cigar of the kind the country can't afford, he turned and offered a duplicate to his rear guard.

"Come on, Blinky," he said, rising from his seat.

Following the boss, Blinky fired up. Five puffs later, he gagged while swallowing forty-nine cents' worth of that fifty-cent rope! For on entering the smoker, Blinky and Marfesso had espied Suddaby just as Suddaby observed the two gangsters!

Suddaby ogled and goggled! Blinky fumbled for the fireworks, preparatory to laying down a barrage! Marfesso looked like a study in frozen assets!

The gang leader, however, was the first to go into action. His right arm flung backward with the motion of a flail. It caught Blinky amidships and mowed that party back through the door. Marfesso leaped after his stunned follower.

"Follow me!" he shouted, bounding down the aisle like a kangaroo.

Blinky made it two kangaroos.

IT took Marfesso exactly eleven bounces to reach his luggage in the last sleeper. A bounce and a half behind, Blinky leaped into view.

"What're we goin' to do?" he panted, touching the ground just once during the questioning.

"We're going to pile off!" Marfesso answered, doing his first "baggage smashin'" in fifteen years and immediately pressing Blinky into service.

Back in the smoker, Suddaby was still paralyzed. Suddenly he, too, hopped into action. Kangaroo Number Three bounced through the train! But Suddaby's direction was engineward.

He burst on Jipp in the manner of a pyromaniac arriving at the scene of a three-alarm fire! His eyes bulged. He puffed like an elephant and blew like a whale.

The arrival of this private panic in Jipp's vicinity immediately brought the latter out of the coma he was in. He called it a doze.

"What's the rush?" he asked.

"Marfesso and that—that—that homicide squad of his—are—on this train!"

"Marfesso!"

Another one-man panic was instantly organized. Jipp almost wailed. He did, in fact, utter a series of sounds that might have so been interpreted without great strain on the imagination.

This exhibition of pathos and palpitation was wasted on Suddaby. He was, for one thing, too much concerned with assembling his luggage.

"What're you doing?" Jipp had allowed the wails to subside to a mere gurgle.

"I'm getting ready to get off. The first time this train stops, hesitates or slows down I'm going to let Marfesso have it."

Suddaby started up the aisle in that determined manner marking a man who has business to attend to.

"Wait a minute," called Jipp, reaching for his bag. "He can have my part of it too."

WHEN the Empire Limited stopped at Gwelt to swill a few thousand gallons before puffing borderward, four passengers were discharged. This action was, for Gwelt, in the nature of a back-to-the-land movement. It brought the population of that watering place to an even four persons.

For Gwelt is one of those names that are not quite, but nearly, a tank town. Only a town is needed to place it in that category. The tank has been there for some time.

This startling increase in Gwelt's vital statistics would not have been so great had the disembarking persons been completely aware of certain circumstances. But since Jipp and Suddaby hopped off the tank side on the train while Marfesso and Blinky dropped from the opposite side, the increase, as previously mentioned, was four.

Jipp's first words on hitting the cinders were brief. But they were extremely sensible—or so thought Suddaby.

"Let's get behind the tank," Jipp said.

And they both got.

There was, behind the tank, a space some four feet square that was invisible from the train. Within this area the partners managed to confine themselves despite their nervousness. But they were in a condition requiring some physical outlet for their emotions.

Jipp eased his tortured soul by executing a Hopi sun dance in the diminutive. He shuffled, shook and shivered.

Suddaby also was having his fling. In his case, however, the movement was more of a hornpipe-jig with the shimmy thrown in at the knees as an added attraction.

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the train, Marfesso and Company had retired to a ditch at the edge of the roadbed. They had been somewhat loath to deposit themselves on the damp earth, but since discretion is the better part of "burning 'em," they were now concealed in the long, tall grasses.

"Them Feds," said Blinky, removing a caterpillar from his ear, "sure means business."

Marfesso turned on his side, the better to move a boulder from beneath that portion of his anatomy known in the

vernacular as the bread-basket.

"We'll ditch 'em here all O.K.," he grunted.

"Them guys should 'a' been burnt."

"Forget it. We might beat the rap on this here income-tax racket, but if we bump one of these guys we'll—"

A blast from the whistle on the Limited smothered Marfesso's remarks on the philosophy of his profession. Additional noises from opened valves and clanking driving rods aided and abetted the smothering. A minute later, the red gleam of the lantern on the observation car was all that was visible of the train.

With all the caution of a pickpocket about to "lift a leather," Marfesso raised his head above the bull rushes. There was no sign of human life. With the exception of the water-tank fifty yards distant, the landscape was as barren as a bald head. But this desolate and far from cheery scene was a panacea for all Marfesso's mental troubles. He grinned and rose to his full height before speaking.

"Come on, Blinky. They're on their way. We'll hop the first train goin' south. Let's get behind that water-tank and get out of this wind."

Tramping up the track, Marfesso silently congratulated himself on the way in which he had put one over. He was in the process of giving himself the third spiritual pat on the back when Suddaby and Jipp were inconsiderate enough to step from behind their hiding-place!

Recognition on the part of the parties of the first, second, third and fourth parts was almost instant and simultaneous! During the next century or two, four persons executed the tableau "Amazement and Consternation." Suddaby was the first to speak.

"Mar—gosh!" he said, dropping a suitcase on Jipp's toes.

"Blink—eek!" echoed Jipp.

The words galvanized Blinky into action. With a movement that placed Billy the Kid in the class of tenderfeet and fumblers, he had achieved the "Ready!—Aim!" position! He quivered like a leashed whippet passing a rabbit hutch.

"Shall I burn 'em, boss? Shall I burn 'em? Le' me burn 'em!"

Marfesso also had miraculously produced a revolver out of the void.

"Keep 'em covered, Blinky," he loboed, "and if they get funny, let 'em have it." He turned his attention to Suddaby. "Just a pair of smart flatfeet, aren't you?" he snarled. "For two cents, I'd let Blinky give you the works!"

"Sgloomp!"

"Listen," continued Marfesso, "I know you guys are hot to give us a vacation at your expense. Blinky and I don't want that kind, see! But I'm always willin' to reason.

"Keep 'em covered, Blinky," Marfesso loboed, "and if they get funny, let 'em have it! —Just a pair of smart flatfeet, aren't you?"

If you want to take a couple of grand and forget where you last seen us, it's O. K. with me. Otherwise—"

He stopped suggestively and glanced at his revolver.

This turn of events had, if anything, an even more disastrous effect on Suddaby's vocal organs. He was all for accepting the idea without additional parley. He attempted a verbal agreement.

"Yaks," he managed, his head bobbing like a buoy.

"Now you're showing some sense," congratulated Marfesso, producing a roll of convincers large enough to corrupt the Federal Prohibition force. "If I'd known you guys were a couple of real sports, we could 'a' fixed this up back in Mineola."

"Yaks," gurgled Suddaby, reaching for the green.

Jipp said nothing. He merely focused a come-hither stare on the gravy in Suddaby's palm.

"Aint I goin' to burn 'em?" asked Blinky anxiously.

"If they aint got sense enough to blow, maybe it'd be just as well."

SUDDABY took the hint. Jipp took up his bag. Seconds later, the partners were plodding southward between the rails.

A half mile down the track, Jipp, contrary to the usual procedure, was the first to speak.

"Divvy up," he said, dropping his bag.

Suddaby produced a bill and divvied. His usual good humor was completely restored. He fairly glistened with glee. He beamed happily on his partner.

"Jipp, my boy," he said, "this certainly has been a sweet racket!"

But Jipp's emotional make-up was of sterner stuff. It was not so malleable. He thought of those moments in the Marfesso living-room and library, those moments on the train, and the last few soul-searing moments west of the water-tower. He recovered his bag, but before trudging onward he uttered one grumpy sentence.

"There aint," he said, "any sweet rackets."

Flame in the Forest

By HAROLD TITUS

"Shore—now, Tip," he gasped. The dog angled across the current; Drake's feet touched bottom, and he reeled to the bank.

The Story Thus Far:

LITTLE KERRY DRAKE had been outside the sawmill office, staring off up the road which Jack and the crew had taken before daylight, and where the cook had just gone with dinner for the fire-fighters, when the bookkeeper called to him.

"Listen, Kerry," Tod had said. "I took the pay-roll out of the cash-drawer, see? It's in this letter-file—this one, right here." He laid his hand on the brown box on top of the safe. Another file was on the desk, and more were on a shelf above it; but Tod put his hand right on that special one. "I'm goin' out to scout around. If anything happens, it may happen fast. The speeder's right on the track, now—right by the water-tank, there. If I yell, you bring the file and come a-runnin'. Understand that?"

"Sure, Tod," said Kerry. The fire had grown rapidly worse—had come close. Tod had yelled to Kerry as he had planned; the boy had brought the precious file, and the speeder had carried them through the flaming forest to town.

A group quickly gathered, mostly old men and boys, because the best man-power of town was out on the fire-line, and they followed Tod and Kerry across the street to the bank, listened to Tod tell in quick high-pitched words what a good hand Kerry was to help save Jack's cash.

They crowded into the bank, and a man rose from his desk behind the counter.

"Jack's headquarters are gone," said Tod, handing the file to the man. "But we brought in the pay-roll. Did my damnedest to save something of camp, but I was alone. Kerry lugged the money out of the office just in time."

"That's fine," said the banker, pressing the catch of the file. "That's sure lucky! I happen to know that if Jack should lose—"

He stopped short then. "Why!" the banker said. "Why, Tod, it's *empty!*"

A moment of terrific silence followed, and then Tod looked down at Kerry and said in a queer, unfriendly way:

"Kid, which file did you bring?"

The boy swallowed, with a new sort of thrill running through his small frame. "Why," he said, "I fetched—You told me the one on the safe, Tod!"

The bookkeeper swore slowly under his breath and looked at the banker.

"Good God, I trusted him!" he said in a whisper.

The other clicked his tongue. "Oh-h," he said, long-drawn. "But he's only a little boy," he added, and slapped the file shut. "That surely is going to be tough for Jack!"

It was indeed tough for Jack—broke him, in fact. He was already seriously ill; and that night he grew worse—he would sit up in the bed and talk wildly; and finally the boy, trying to soothe him, crept close into the arms, and that seemed to bring peace to the old man.

After Jack was quiet, the boy whispered:

"It aint so, what they're tellin', Jack. I didn't take the wrong one, unless he told me wrong."

Jack Snow swore a slow and terrible oath, then.

"He *could* of," he muttered. "He *could* of set that fire himself. And buried it and dug it up since the fire, and put the bee on a little feller! I'll send after him and find out! He aint so fur on his way west, yet!" he declared; but when Kerry tried to tell him that Tod had gone east instead of west, the old man did not listen.

Before morning he was much worse, and that day they took Kerry away; and before the week was out, he had no old Jack looking after him, nor would he ever have again. The Poor Commissioner was his boss now, and was boarding him out. . . .

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THIS deeply interesting novel of the North Woods lumber country is, it seems to us, the best yet written by an able author already well known for "Timber," "The Beloved Pawn," "The Forest War" and other books.

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

Years later, a man grown who earned his living as a wandering timber cruiser, Kerry Drake heard of a man named Tod West who had become a little king in the lumbering business along Madwoman River; and with his Chesapeake retriever Tip, Kerry turned his canoe in that direction. He arrived opportunely—saw through his glasses a girl leap into the water from a boat to escape from a man. Kerry ran a swift rapid to reach the spot, threw the man into the river, took the girl to shore—and discovered to his great joy that he had paid part of his score, for the man was Tod West. The girl, he learned, was Nan Downer, whose father had had a very up-to-date scheme in the lumbering business—selling off his land to rich men for hunting and fishing clubs while himself retaining certain timber rights. But he had been murdered the previous year and his pay-roll money stolen. And Nan was trying to carry on while West was using her debts as a lever to force her into marriage. . . . That night Drake met West again—in a poker game—and caught him cheating, though the other players refused to believe it. *(The story continues in detail:)*

AT about the time Kerry Drake was finishing his evening meal, Nan Downer and Ezra Adams—short, squat, gray-haired logging-country doctor who had driven out from Shoestring, the county seat—walked slowly across the trestle from Nan's headquarters to West's landing.

The old man listened attentively, and unconsciously slowed his pace as the girl's story progressed toward its climax. Her voice, though low, was quick and tense, and once it caught in a sob. The Doctor drew her hand through his arm and held it close.

"And that's that, Ezra!" she said tremulously. "It's me or—or the property. Oh,"—with sudden bitterness,—"I've had a feeling all along that he wasn't the man the country thinks him to be!"

"That's your womanly intuition. And my opinion was a—a doctor's, I guess."

They talked for a time, standing in the dusk, and then the girl said,

"Now for Jim and Elsie Hinkel's troubles!" and led him resolutely on.

They entered a tar-paper-covered house where a woman washed dishes by the light of a kerosene lamp, her mouth set in an expression of forbearance. In a chair, one leg strapped between wooden splints, a five-year-old boy played with a battered toy. At sight of the physician, he began to yelp excitedly and threw the toy violently away.

"Unc' Ezra! Unc' Ezra!" he cried.

"Hullo, Jimmy! Evening, Elsie. All ready to be measured up for the brace, eh? Well, well—we've come

along so far, and have kind of a leg left. Now we'll start on the job of making a silk purse out of—something."

He began pulling off his coat. "Where's Jim?" he asked.

The woman's face darkened. "At the store, I guess. Gambling again, I suppose. I sent over for him when I saw you drive up to Miss Nan's, and he said he'd be along. But there's no tellin'."

"Well, we'll go ahead, anyhow."

And he went ahead, holding the misshapen leg on his knees, eying the long blue creases of some terrible hurt; and Nan looked on, watching the play of his deft fingers.

The painstaking chore finally finished and no Jim in sight, the two walked toward the store, Ezra saying:

"Of course, if Jim hasn't the cash, I'll have to buy the brace myself. I told him that last time I was out; and he promised. But"—with a sigh—"times being what they are, I'm scraping the bottom of the till myself!"

So they approached the store and saw what they saw. . . .

And after Kerry had gone on down to the river, Nan Downer began to follow at a swift walk which broke into a run as she neared the stream. He was about to shove off when she hailed him cautiously.

"Oh, there! Mr. Drake!"

He paused, one foot in the canoe.

"Yes?"

"It's Nan Downer." He waited, and she came close. "I—that is, you see—I was outside, and heard, and saw and—

"Did you mean that?" she asked, suddenly steady. "About staying here, I mean?"

"Why, when a man's been ordered off, he can't very well go, can he?"

"No—not some men."

Her face was a lovely oval in the starlight. The aroma of her dark hair assailed him. He stepped up the bank, closer to her. He had never let women figure largely in his life, but surely there comes to every man a time for a woman. He told himself that as he looked at her, and wondered if this could be such an hour for him!

"Would it bother you, having me around?" he asked.

His seriousness evidently struck her because she caught one hand in the other as if, perhaps, surprised.

"Of course not! But there are two things I'm thinking. The first is about yourself: Do you think you'll be wholly safe here after tonight?"

"From West, you mean? Oh, that wouldn't matter. Other things, though, might scare me." He wanted to say that one of them was beauty like hers, but did not. "No, I'm not afraid of West. He's bad people, for sure. He surprised folks, showin' a gun. And a gun in a shoulder holster never's so good."

"But he's powerful and ruthless."

"I think I know all there is to know about him. . . . But that's only one item. You said there were two."

She seemed to hesitate.

"I'm wondering if it would be too much to ask that you not say anything about what you saw this afternoon?"

"Sure not. If you want it so, Miss Downer."

"I—you see, it's a queer situation. I've a boy working for me: Holt Stuart. My father brought him up from the University forestry school last year. He's younger than you are, I'd judge, and quite—quite quick-tempered. He's terribly interested in the job, and—and in me a little, I'm afraid. And if he thought that Tod West had done what he did today—I'm afraid, you see; especially since I saw him with a gun."

Drake stood silent a moment.

"I understand," he said. "This Holt Stuart's gone on you, and so much so that he'd let himself in for trouble with a rough party like West. . . . I see. . . . Sure, I'll keep my mouth shut!"

"And that's another mark of my indebtedness to you! I have told Ezra Adams. He's a doctor in Shoestring; he's here tonight. Since my father died, he's been guide, counselor and friend. That is enough to know about West's threat against me."

Already gone, was she? A vague and foolish jealousy for this Holt Stuart swam into Kerry's consciousness. . . . Oh, well!

"I'll see you again, maybe. Likely, I won't be here so long." Things were tugging at his heart now. Impulsively he said: "Helping you out today was simple. I wish I could help you on your other trouble. If I thought I could give a hand there, you bet I'd risk takin' root!"

"You're generous. I'll see you again. I'm so thankful to you. Good-night!"

She was gone, then, and he stood watching her vague outline approach the store. He had never seen a girl he wanted to help as much as he wanted to help Nan Downer. He didn't care whether she was in love with some one else or not: He'd like to do things for her!

He shoved off and paddled for camp.

Back in the store, Tod West, in the center of a group, was saying to Jim:

"Hell, no! I won't take back that money! He's a rat and a liar, Jim, but—" He shrugged, and met Jim's eyes squarely, covering the effort required neatly. "Lord, boy, I've always tried to lean backward in my dealin's with others! No sir. If any man says I took money unfairly, I don't even want to argue. Not on your life, I don't. Money aint worth that, Jim!"

CHAPTER VI

KERRY sat in the darkness on the river-bank, listening to the hooting of an owl and the song of crickets and the plopping of a night-feeding trout. He smoked leisurely; and Tip, his head in his master's lap, breathed evenly. . . .

So his childish suspicion had been right; so the last sane thought—also a suspicion—which Jack Snow had had, was justified! Damage done that long ago could not be repaired. But he had settled the question that had made him what he was, a roamer—the question which had given him a bitter boyhood.

And now another uneasy thing was worrying at him. He couldn't get the sound of Nan Downer's voice out of his ears—although she was deeply interested in another who, by her own admission, was so in love with her that he was in danger of embroiling himself with West, should he know what had happened upstream today. He stirred, impatient with himself for letting such impulses loose.

"Don't be a damned fool, Kerry!" he growled. "The world must be full of girls. Don't be a poacher!"

The dog had lifted his head sharply, and Kerry could

feel him stiffen. After a moment, a low vibration ran along his back, which meant the beginning of a growl.

"Steady!" the man whispered, and reached for his bed, jerking his rifle from the blanket-folds.

Then, aloud, he hailed:

"Who's there?"

A voice from above answered:

"Caller, Drake! Still up?" A flash-light winked hastily and went out. Slow footsteps came through the poplars.

Drake, on his feet, waited with the dog stiff and suspicious beside him.

"Funny business, bustin' in on a man this way, this hour," the voice went on, nearer now. "But I got things to talk over." Kerry could see the other. He was short, squat, and breathed rapidly. "I'm named Adams, Drake—Ezra Adams. I'm the local pill-peddler!"

"Oh, hullo, Doctor!" The old man's voice had been appealing. "Glad you dropped in. Here, sit on the bed. I go kind of light, and the place isn't just luxurious. Light your pipe?"

He could see the old man stare across the river and cock his head as if to listen.

"No, guess not, thanks. I—this is kind of confidential."

"So?"

He felt the other's attempt to scrutinize his own shadowed face. "Sit down. Nobody can get within earshot with Tip here."

"Oh, a dog, eh? Yes, Nan told me about him. Well, nice feller!" He stroked the dog's nose, and then, with a grunt or two, settled himself to the edge of the bed.

"There! That's better. I notice, as the years go on, that excitement'll make old bones weary!" He paused a moment. "I was in the store when Tod made his play, Drake. I saw and heard; and—things have happened since that make me feel maybe I'm going to have to ask your help, strangers though we are."

Kerry made no comment. He liked this old man, and yet—he was in a strange country.

"Strangers!" Ezra repeated. "But bein' a doctor does certain things for a man. It gives him a pretty fair insight into what goes on in the minds and hearts of other men when he can observe 'em in certain situations and actions. I had a chance to look at you this evenin', and I—I took to you."

Kerry chuckled in a sort of embarrassment.

"Also, I heard about what happened this afternoon. I added that to what I know about you.

"The first thing I came to ask is this: How long are you going to stay here? I heard you say to West that you wouldn't be driven off."

"Only until he's sure that I'm not going because he wants me to."

"Hum—pressing business elsewhere?"

"None at all."

Pause. "I see. Then if you could be interested in a job here, you'd be free to take it?"

"Job? What kind of job?"

The old man eyed him in the darkness. "Coroner's clerk," he said in a whisper.

"You kidding me?"

"Not in the least. I'm—I'm more serious and in a greater need than I've been since I can recollect."

"Well, that's a new one on me!" Kerry laughed. "Coroner's clerk! Why—"

"Let me explain this a little: I have to pop it right at you without any preliminaries, because it's—it's an emergency, I guess. First, though, will you tell me what Nan Downer told you this afternoon about her trouble?"

"Well, she told a lot in few words!" Drake narrated Nan's story of her predicament to him.

The Doctor nodded slowly.

"That's the meat of the matter, all right. She didn't go into detail about the killing of her father, though. I want you to know that. You've *got* to know it—that is, if you're going to consider my proposal.

"You see, Downer was a queer old duffer. Salt of the earth, but queer—eccentric. It was one of his eccentricities that led to his murder. He never would deal with a man except for cash. Kept a bank-account and all, but when he did business, checks didn't go. He liked to count out the currency.

"He had this payment due to West last November. The fifteenth, it was. That was pay-day at his mill, too. The day before, he drove into town and drew the money from the bank, started home about dusk—and was killed not three miles from here by a bullet in the brain. The money, in one of these tin boxes, was taken out of his car. It amounted to over twelve thousand dollars—twelve thousand, four hundred and sixty, to be exact.

"Well, what snow we'd had was gone; the ground was

"Did you mean that?" Nan asked, suddenly steady. "About—staying, I mean?" "Why, when a man's been ordered off, he can't very well go, can he?" said Drake.

frozen tight; the country was full of deer-hunters; and the body wasn't found until the next morning.

"You see, I'm coroner here. I started an investigation; and the sheriff, he fussed some, but that's about the extent of his abilities—fussing.

"Two men, only, that we knew of, had the slightest motive. One was Jim Hinkel, whose money you got back for him tonight. He'd been working for Cash, had been fired the day before, and fired with gusto, which was Downer's way. But he was playing cribbage with Tod West all that evening, and stayed in West's house all night, his family being away. So, with West being what he's thought to be,"—dryly—"Hinkel was counted out."

"WEST was quite active in this," Adams continued. "He'd liked Cash, evidently, and he wanted his money. He dug up the information that Holt Stuart had had a run-in with Cash early in the week. Know about Holt? You do, eh? Well, it seems that Holt is pretty well struck with Nan. He's a good boy, but Cash was a cantankerous old cuss, and he rode the boy pretty hard because of where he'd let his interests stray. As a sort of punishment, he sent Holt out to a cabin on Townline Lake, to do some mapping, and made him stay there all alone.

"The sheriff, after West got through with him, was pretty well worked up about Holt, and started right in to work up a case. But I stopped that. A coroner, you know, has got it all over a sheriff for authority. I drove out, and found the boy with an ankle so badly sprained that he couldn't possibly 've been out. I know sprains, and I told the sheriff if he didn't drop his talk about Holt, I'd show him up. He dropped it.

"Well, we impaneled a coroner's jury, and I got the bullet out of Cash; but we had so little to go on that the verdict had to be an open one. Then we started trying to trace the money. It was mostly in hundreds. The hundreds were all new Federal Reserve notes, and the bank had the serial numbers. We broadcast those, and then called it a day. That's where it sits now."

"Downer's dead, and the money's gone," commented Kerry. "And even if a bill does show up here and there, the chances of getting it all are mighty slim—slimmer than getting the murderer, even." The old physician was watching him, waiting, he felt, for him to say more. "Lord, if Miss Downer could get hold of that cash, it'd save her life, wouldn't it?"

"It would!"—again dryly. "That's what I'm here for. To see if you'll help me locate it."

"Locate it? What d'you mean?"

"This!" The old man leaned forward and tapped Drake's knee. "The money," he whispered, "is still in the country!"

"The devil!"

"Truth! In my pocket I have a twenty-dollar bill that was part of it. No one but the banker and I know that they had, besides the serial numbers of the hundreds, the numbers of eight brand-new twenties. This bill hasn't been folded three times! It was paid me on account tonight."

"You got any idea where it came from?"

Ezra looked around and listened.

"Out of your poker-game," he said grimly.

After a moment Kerry gave a low whistle.

"Well!" he said. "That makes the situation look up, doesn't it?"

"That's why I came to you, a stranger. I need help, and need it right now! That money is cached somewhere in the country. Whoever is hiding it, needs money badly. That's the first bill to be put into circulation out of the lot. Drake, will you take a commission as my deputy?"

Kerry's heart was beating rapidly. Here, indeed, was a chance to do something for Nan Downer. He waited a moment, considering all things. Then he said:

"I'll go you, Doctor!"

"Good! But we'll have to keep it between you and me. Not even Nan must know. And you and I mustn't be seen much together. We've a lot to talk over, and it's getting late already."

And leaning back on one elbow, the old man cleared his throat and began to talk again. . . .

Across the river in the great house of peeled logs which was Tod West's abode, that individual sat confronting Jim Hinkel, whose eyes did not meet the other's.

"And now it's up to you," West said heavily. "I guess I've done enough for you, Jim, to expect it, too!"

"But I don't like it so well!" protested Jim. "He's nobody to fool with! How'll I look, headin' a delegation that goes to run him down the river?"

"You mean because he made a play at getting your money back?"

"Well, not just—"

"But that's in your head, Jim!"—sharply. "You can't kid me! You think he did you a favor, with all your talk in the store about wantin' me to take the cash. I s'pose, if you were to be honest, you'd say you thought I *did* deal crooked!"

"Oh, hell, no! I tell you, I—"

"Shut up!" Savagely, West rose. "Because a rat comes along and gets your money back for you, you're convinced I'm a crook. You can't cover up, Jim! Your face's like an open book!"

"Well, what if I do think it? What then, eh?"

Tremblingly the man rose, at last asserting himself.

"So that's it, eh?" West rubbed his palms briskly together. "So that's the lay of the land? Well, when you've forgotten everything else about me, remember this:

"I lied for you once, didn't I? I told 'em all that I played cribbage with you the night Downer was killed, didn't I? And nobody knows I found you wanderin' around so blind drunk you couldn't tell where you'd been? And with a rifle, too? What, I ask you,"—bending over and rubbing hands on his hips,—"what'd happen if I came clean with the sheriff and told him *that*, eh? If any man ever would be under suspicion of murder then, who'd it be?"

Hinkel raised a trembling hand to his chin.

"You wouldn't do that, Tod?"

"Try me, and see!"

Their gazes locked, and after a time Jim's fell.

"All right," he said. "I'll get the boys. Tomorrow, we'll try him out."

But when Hinkel was gone, and Tod West was alone, he paced the floor, back and forth, up and down. Fine sweat was on his brow, and his lips worked. Once he stopped and stared hard at the wall, as if listening. Or perhaps he was seeing handwriting on that wall!

CHAPTER VII

THE sun had climbed from the bank of orange clouds which screened its rising; the mill whistle had blown, and the saw had taken up its daily song.

Kerry Drake had been up with the break of day, built his fire, bathed in the stinging waters of the river, and dressing leisurely, set his shaving kit on a stump beside the stream and proceeded to clean cheeks and chin of stubble. Today he was going to present himself to Nan Downer and ask for work—a move which Ezra Adams had urged—and he did not choose to go before her unshaven as an applicant for a job.

"He was killed by a bullet in the brain. The money, in one of those tin boxes, was taken out of his car."

That is what he told himself, with a chuckle, half denying the truth that his first desire was to appear at his best before the girl for purely personal reasons!

It was while peering into the mirror as he began manipulating the razor that his eyes narrowed and became most intent. Across the way, spruces grew thick along the bank, and as he turned his back to the river, he caught in the mirror a reflection of branches being parted, of a face peering at him.

He pretended to give this watcher no heed, but he took long at his shaving, and half a dozen times had a fair glimpse of the man's face. It was no one he had seen before.

Breakfast finished, and the day still being young, he took his rifle from its place in the fold of a blanket and proceeded to clean from it the flecks of rust formed where spray had boarded his canoe yesterday in the running of Dead Bear rapid.

He was not at all surprised when Tip, recumbent beside the fire, raised his head sharply and gave a low growl.

"Easy, chum!" Kerry muttered. "Comin' into the open, eh?"

But it was nothing across the stream which had attracted the dog; nor was the man approaching the one who had spied on him from the timber.

Jim Hinkel was walking along the trail which followed the bank above the flat, and walking intently, as one with a grim purpose.

Kerry looked up and nodded. The other did not respond. He came down through the poplar thicket rapidly; and his "Mornin'!" as he passed the tent and slowed, was gruff, markedly hostile.

"Well, Jim?" Drake asked. He did not rise, but sat there cross-legged, rubbing at the last rust fleck with a greasy rag. Tip, stiff with suspicion, investigated the caller with quirking nostrils.

Hinkel plunged at once into his errand:

"I've come to tell you," he said, "that this aint a very healthy place for you to hang around!"

His face was flushed a trifle, and though he spoke belligerently, it was obviously difficult for him to keep his eyes on Drake's face.

"So? Kind of you to take this trouble. Is this a—a friendly act or a warning, Jim?"

"Call it what you want to. I come here because it looked last night as if you was doin' me a favor. Instead you put me in a hell of a hole. You, nor nobody else, can make me think that Tod West would cheat at cards!"

A whiff of surprise escaped Kerry. He left off his fussing with the gun, and locked his hands about a knee.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he breathed. "You really aren't convinced?"

The man made an impatient gesture and looked away. With his eyes removed from Kerry's face he seemed at better ease.

"Yes. I don't know what your game was, but when a stranger in this country makes a play like that with a man like Tod—well, he don't get far."

"Maybe. Not at first."

"Or anywhere along the line!" He seemed to be making an effort to lash himself into a mood of truculence. "If you'd stuck around to hear what they said in the store last night, you'd find out how far you got. Tod insisted that they look the cards over, and do you think anyone of us would? Not on your life! And he made me take my money back, too—said he wouldn't even take it if I'd owed it to him after havin' suspicion put on him. He—

"If you know what's good for you," Hinkel broke off with still more heat, "you'll haul out today!"

"And if I shouldn't—what then?"

Hinkel shrugged. "Well, I'd figure I'd done all that anybody can do for you by comin' here." He advanced a few steps, his voice moderating. "I'm not handin' you anything, Drake. I'm just doin' you a friendly act. This country thinks a lot of Tod, and there's men here that won't stand to see anything done against him."

"Yeah? West, and who else?"

"Plenty!"

Drake let his head drop backward and laughed. He watched a Cooper's hawk, wings set, his rounded, barred

"When a stranger in this country makes a play like that with Tod—well, he don't get far. . . . If you know what's good for you—you'll haul out today." "And if I shouldn't," Kerry asked, "what then?"

tail spread, circle gracefully and alight on the branch of a dead stub upstream. Then he asked:

"And just what might happen?"

Darkly, Hinkel replied: "Anything, from havin' your outfit smashed and scattered to—to things that'd hurt a lot worse."

On this, Kerry thought his manner was evidently honest; that a grave concern weighed on him.

"Did he send you here?"

"No!"

"You're a poor liar, Jim!"

"What d'you mean by that?"—harshly. "You asked me, and I told you. I come on my own account. If you won't take friendly advice, then I'll give it to you from another direction: you'd better git up and git while you're able to travel; and if you think that's a threat from me, mebby you won't be so far wrong!"

His eyes blazed, then.

A flitting something against the sky nipped Drake's attention. The hawk had left his lofty perch. He was circling swiftly, mounting, getting above a darting swallow. His wings beat rapidly; and then poising, banking, he plunged downward, a dive for the kill. He missed as the swallow swooped; he mounted again; and Kerry, rising quickly to one knee, threw the rifle to his shoulder.

Again the hawk poised for the death-plunge, and in that split instant before he plummeted downward, the rifle spoke. The outspread wings collapsed; the bird turning over, leaped higher into the air; a puff of feathers trailed away from the twisting, tumbling body. Again the rifle cracked, and the bird was in twain, one portion of what had an instant before been a living creature flying upward a few feet, the other floating downward toward the stream. . . . A third time Drake fired, and the lower fragment spat feathers and spun. . . . A fourth and still a fifth. . . . He had missed with the fourth, but the last shot sent what was left of the bird of prey shooting sidewise to drop with a light plop into the shallows on the far side of the Madwoman, directly in front of where he had seen branches parted and a face watching him. . . . He fired all but his last shell, and a great splash of water showered the spruces. He cocked his head to listen to faint sounds of hasty withdrawal, and grinned.

He ejected the shell and turned to Hinkel.

"Anything else, Jim?" he asked lightly.

The man drew a deep breath.

"I want to know what you're goin' to do," he said. "I come to warn you to be gone. What's your answer?"

"Answer?"—sharply. "Answer? Good Lord, man, do you want *more* of an answer?"

His straight look was hard and cold, and the other flinched beneath it.

"And if your friend across the way doesn't stay out of that timber, I'm likely to try a little target practice so close it'll be uncomfortable!"

"Friend? What are you getting at?"

Kerry searched the man's face.

"Well, Jim, at least you're honest in *that!*" he said. "Maybe he was there to watch both of us. Who knows?"

"I don't know what the hell you're talkin' about!" Hinkel growled, and turned away. He hesitated, faced Drake again, and then without further speech went on as if glad to be quit of that place and presence.

CHAPTER VIII

"SO that was that!"

He had been spied upon since daybreak, had been warned to clear out, by an emissary who did not say all that he thought and felt. Such items might indicate interesting factors of the situation and should be pondered over, but first he had other things to do.

He and Ezra had decided that since he had an official if secret standing now, it would scarcely do for him to remain in the country with no better excuse than the impulse to defy Tod West. A number of activities were possible, but of the several which the old coroner men-

tioned only one struck Kerry as interesting. This was that he apply to Nan Downer for work.

The thought gave him a peculiar thrill, an enthusiasm which was quite new to his experience. First in importance, he told himself, was the fact that she was in trouble, harassed by Tod West, and that anything he could do to help her and injure the man would bring him great satisfaction. But there he was not admitting the whole of what he felt. Working for Nan would permit him to see her frequently, let him hear the sound of her voice.

NOT long after Jim Hinkel's departure Kerry set out, Tip following at his heels.

As he passed the sawmill, a yard-man pushing a lumber-buggy said to his boss:

"That's the feller who tried to make a monkey out of Tod West."

"So? Well, he's a big one, but they got to come pretty *damn*' big when they take on a chore like that!"

Beyond the mill Kerry passed the boarding-house and a short row of tar-paper-covered houses occupied by workers and their families.

"That," said one woman to her neighbor, "must be the party who was told to be on his way by Tod West last night."

Her companion peered eagerly through a window.

"Land sakes!"—incredulously. "An' he's still *here?*"

Which brace of exchanges was indicative of the community feeling toward a young man who had willfully crossed the country's dominant figure.

And something of the sort was in Nan Downer's mind as she looked up from her desk and listened to his brief speech explaining his presence.

"A job?" she asked, and surprise mingled with the other emotions in her face.

It was not the surprise which made the deep impression on Drake. It was the quick coloring of her cheeks, the waxing light in her eyes which bespoke an interest in him over and above any amazement or regret or enthusiasm which his question might have provoked.

"Yes, a job. You know how it is, I guess: I've sort of got to stick around awhile; and when I'm in one place, I don't just hanker to loaf."

She traced a pencil-line on a pad before her, considering.

"I said all that I can by way of warning last night. If you want to take a chance of defying Tod West, it is your affair. What sort of job are you after?"

Kerry grinned.

"Mebby I'll have to ask what kind of jobs you've got on hand! I can do a lot of things in and around the woods, all the way from cruising, up through logging operations to milling."

"Are you a draftsman as well?"

She turned to a series of large maps hanging from the wall—greens and reds and blues splashing the surfaces to indicate the various types of growth which cloaked the descriptions, with figures showing the size and densities of stands, with streams and lakes set down in detail.

"You see," she explained, "these prospects of ours are the sort who will want to know, down to the last detail, what we're offering in exchange for their money. My father found that the easiest way to interest men of affairs was to have everything on paper where they could consider it intelligently. It's a little difficult to find cruisers who can do the job, because it's more than an ordinary cruise. Holt has done it all himself so far, but he's overworked, and we have people waiting for maps.

"Could you do just this sort of thing as well as these jobs have been done?"

No fooling about this girl! Her question was blunt, and brooked no evasion or qualification in answer.

Drake stepped closer to the maps, studying them at lengthy interval.

"I can," he said finally.

Nan hesitated.

"Of course, we can't pay you what you might get some other place. We're—we're up against it, as you already know."

She was obviously embarrassed, but Kerry said quickly: "Don't worry about that." He looked at her, his appreciation of the situation stirring a profound sympathy. "I'll get pay in other things than cash," he said gently. "I'd figure, Miss Downer, that it'd be a privilege working for you."

"I think," she answered, and flushed, "that we'd better consider any arrangement we might make as a purely business matter."

Her attempt at rebuke was not highly successful. He smiled, and when confusion appeared in her face he laughed outright.

"Fine!" he cried. "When do we start?"

"I can't talk that detail with you now, because Holt is out on the job. We've worked such things out together since my father died. He'll be back this evening. Will you come up then?"

He would, he said, and started out of the office. Nan followed, and paused beside him as he halted in the great main room of her headquarters, looking about at the stained log walls, at the huge fireplace built of native boulders, at the deer-heads and bearskin rugs, at the mounted trout and ducks and grouse. Old Cash Downer, he remarked to himself, was no poor salesman. This place made an excellent atmosphere, attractive to men of the sort Downer had hoped to bring to the Madwoman!

Tip stood outside the screen door and now whined.

"Oh, here's the dog!" Nan cried, going quickly ahead of Drake, opening the door and kneeling on the step. The dog inspected her busily, and at first bore himself with perfect indifference—being, as he was, a one-man beast. But when her small hand came to rest on the broad crown of his head, and her gentle voice told him what a handsome fellow he was—why, then the tail commenced to waggle a bit, and his eyes rolled, and his pink tongue lolled a little, and he panted with that satisfaction which comes upon any male with sufficient flattery!

He looked up at his master and blinked as if to say:

"Gosh, Kerry, see what *I've* found! And d'you hear what she's sayin'? Swell, aint it?"

"He likes me!" the girl laughed happily.

"Why shouldn't he?" Drake asked with all sobriety. "That dog's got sense!" Then he laughed as color again stained her cheeks.

HE started back toward his camp, and had gone halfway from Nan's headquarters to the mill when he saw a man running along the railroad track toward the trestle. Then another! And from West's Landing, three more were crossing rapidly. . . . Then a scream reached his ears.

"Something stirring!" he muttered, and began to trot.

Breaking over a little rise in the ground he had a good view of the trestle. A knot of people were on it, a man was poising to dive into the river; one was already in the water.

"What's up?" Drake called to a man.

"Somebody fell in!"

A woman's scream cut the air sharply, and Drake saw a man grasp her arms, holding her from hurling herself into the current.

"Kid, I'll bet, Tip!" he muttered.

Sure enough, a child. "Little girl!" a boy answered excitedly when he asked the question again. "Dunno who!"

Kerry did not join the growing stream of men and women that flowed out on the trestle. More were arriving; the mill whistle blew one short blast. Swimmers were working downstream; men on the bank were shouting directions and gesticulating frantically. Clouds had overcast the sun, and the hard, dead light was thrown back from the stream's surface, making it impossible for sight to penetrate the depths of the big pool below the bridge.

"Down farther! Down farther!" a man cried and another disputed: "'Taint so! Straight out from where you be!" And another urged the swimmers to go farther up. . . . A moment for cool heads, surely!

KERRY paused at the water's edge and jerked at his pac laces.

"Tip!" The dog, tail vibrating as this excitement infected him, peered eagerly into his face. "Somebody in there—in the river! On the bottom. . . . Fetch!"

In went the retriever, swimming rapidly straight out from shore. He faced upstream, and gave Kerry one quick look of query as if asking for a lead.

"*Fetch!*"

Tip circled slowly in the current, head tilted, trying to see below the surface. Then suddenly he dived. He did not go deep; his tail protruded, and he was under but a second, rising to shake his head and circle again and go under a second time.

"*Fetch, Tip!*" Drake cried sharply when he came up. Seconds were passing; seconds meant life. . . .

A half-dozen men were in the river, diving from logs or from the trestle, all searching blindly, while orders and beseechings were shouted at them from the growing crowd.

And then, below and outside these frantic searchers, Tip came up with a sharp little yip!

At that Drake went in, throwing himself across the narrow shallows and swimming stanchly.

The dog circled and went under again, diving for the same spot from which he had risen with his little bark of accomplishment.

When he came up, his master was beside him.

"Good dog!" he gasped, and doubled his body, and dived for the bottom.

It was dark down there. Disturbance above had stirred a slight roil to aggravate the poor visibility. He drove himself deep with mighty sweeps of his mighty arms, with powerful scissor-kicks of his long legs. He held his eyes wide open, and when he felt his ability to stay down longer slipping rapidly, he groped wildly. His hand touched a slimy snag; and then, lungs at the bursting-point, he was forced to shoot upward.

He broke the surface, shaking water from his eyes and gasping air. A babel of voices was in his ears. Men were shouting and pointing at the dog; another was just diving at the spot where Kerry had gone down.

He breasted the current stalwartly, swimming a crawl-stroke, and made for the point where Tip was circling and barking frantically.

He went farther upstream, this time, and faced about and dived with the current, utilizing its flow rather than fighting it. Again he found the snag, but that was all.

"Give me a show!" he gasped, as another swimmer came close. "Hold it, Tip!" He needed the dog over that one spot for a marker.

Again he dived, and this time he thought he caught a vague flash of lighter color in the murky depths as he drifted past. He rose quickly and swam his best to get back to a point above the spot.

As he turned, he saw that other swimmer so close to him again that his freedom of action was restricted. Straight black hair was plastered over a swarthy brow; angular black eyes looked past him. Even in that moment of stress, Kerry had time to remark that this was the face which had peered at him while he shaved this morning. . . . Common cause, surely, a child drowning!

He went down again, down and down, deep and deeper. He clenched his jaws. The depths hurt his eardrums; his lungs cried out for relief from this repeated strain. . . .

And then pressure was on his back; on the small of his back a hand was placed; fingers were fastening in his shirt. . . .

He kicked savagely, rolled over, eluded the clutch and shot upward. He dashed a hand across his eyes, gulped air through open mouth. A rod below him the swarthy man rose, spitting, and turned upstream. He gave Drake one glance, and the dark eyes shone with malice!

Trying *that!* And now, of all times! The fellow was not trying to find the child; he was intent on bringing harm upon one who was! A bitter loathing sang in Kerry's heart for a moment, but he drove it away. No time, this, for personal animosities. If an attempt were being made on his life now, it meant only one thing to him: added danger for a little girl, somewhere on the bottom!

He took a deep breath and went down again, water hurting his ears, pressing against his throat, squeezing his arms and legs in its cool clutch. . . . And once more that vague blotch of lighter color. . . . Sand? A boulder? A clay ledge? One more effort, now! He expelled the air from his lungs and put all his will, all his heart and consciousness into a final downward stroke. His reaching hand touched something soft; his fingers entwined there. It was cloth! The current bore at him; his grip on the fabric held. He was turned about, his feet carried downstream; his dwindling strength was no match for the Madwoman. . . . Nor for a clutch on his ankle, twisting it, slipping along his leg for the knee!

He kicked, and his foot shoved something out of the way. His other hand had the snag, again. He was dragging himself against the current, tugging at that garment, battling to dislodge it. . . . His head buzzed; a quick nausea spread through his vitals. He felt that this was his last instant of consciousness. His tortured lungs expanded, and water gushed into his throat. He wrenched mightily with the one hand as a new, an inner darkness, engulfed him, and then gave up—yielded, let his lungs have their way, and was breathing—sweet air!

Air bathed his tortured throat as he gagged and spat water, driving the darkness from his mind, the sickness from his body. He was on the surface, barely able to float, but he was not alone! In the crook of his arm was a limp, light body!

UPSTREAM he heard screams and shouts. None had noticed that he came up with a burden. He was below the last swimmer, below the last excited onlooker. He drew the child's head to the surface, got a hand beneath her chin, and kicked feebly.

He tried to shout for help, but his voice was a gurgle. He redoubled his efforts, but his strength was spent. And then a whine in his ear, and hot breath on his cheek, and Tip was there at his side!

"Good—" he gasped. "*Shore—shore, now.*"

He fastened fingers in the mat of stiff curly hair; the dog angled across the current; Drake's floundering feet touched bottom, and he reeled to the bank. . . .

They'd be coming in a moment. He would have help

in seconds, perhaps. But the light figure in his arms was so limp! And he needed the strength that shouting would demand for what must be done without delay—without the delay of a fractional instant!

He dropped to his knees beside a log. He threw the little girl face down across it. He hooked a finger in the mouth, prying open the set jaws, flattening the tongue, and bore his weight down on her back. Water gushed from the mouth. Again he drove water from the small lungs, and again, while strength poured back into his own body.

Others were coming now; help was on the way. A man was almost to him; more streamed behind. But there was a job to do, and he knew how to do it, and of all these others, he had no way of knowing their competence for the task, for the task that would give strength to this last and perhaps waning hope.

Roughly he lifted the small body, with arms and legs so pitifully lifeless, and stretched it on the log, head lower than the feet. He jerked one of the child's arms beneath her face, rolled her head to one side, and straddling the log, placed his great palms across the lower ribs and pressed firmly. . . .

He held the lungs compressed an instant and let the ribs spring outward. Down again went his weight, and water gushed from the mouth.

"Can't I help? Say, you're all in an'—" The first arrival stood back at the imperious jerk of Drake's head. He had no breath for speech, but he was getting along, now—getting along.

Down went the ribs; back they came—down again, back once more. Water ceased to come from the mouth. Bubbles clustered at the nostrils.

A distracted woman burst through the growing group. She tried to hurl herself on Drake, on the child, and men took her gently away. Another woman, face set in a terrible expression of understanding, folded the hysterical woman in her arms.

Better now. His head was clearing; his lungs less frantic for air.

"Keep 'em back," he gasped. "She'll want—all the air—"

Self-appointed leaders shoved the crowd back until it stood in a wide circle, Drake and the child alone in the center.

Steadily he worked, watching that waxen profile for sign. Down. . . . Hold. . . . Up. . . . Down again! The group was quiet now, watching with tensity stamped on faces. Women had the mother—because, surely, such distress could only have been a mother's—on the high bank. Her sobs had taken on a high-pitched wailing.

Ten minutes passed. Men were looking at one another, shifting from one foot to its mate restlessly.

"What do you think, Drake?" some one asked. They knew his name. He had told it to them last night when they sided against him. But he was in command now!

He twisted his head doubtfully, and a sharp pang of dismay ran his heart. It was not nice, doubting his own ability to restore life to a child. He had tried this and failed with a man, once. But that had been a man. . . . This was a child, so slender, so tender! A lump swelled in his throat, but he drove it down.

The girl's one arm, hanging inert over the log, swayed dismally as he worked. . . .

Fifteen minutes; the watchers were shifting and muttering. The child's eyes were half open. . . . Brown eyes, he saw.

A man began to talk.

"Damn' near had her myself," he said. "Was right by him when he found her."

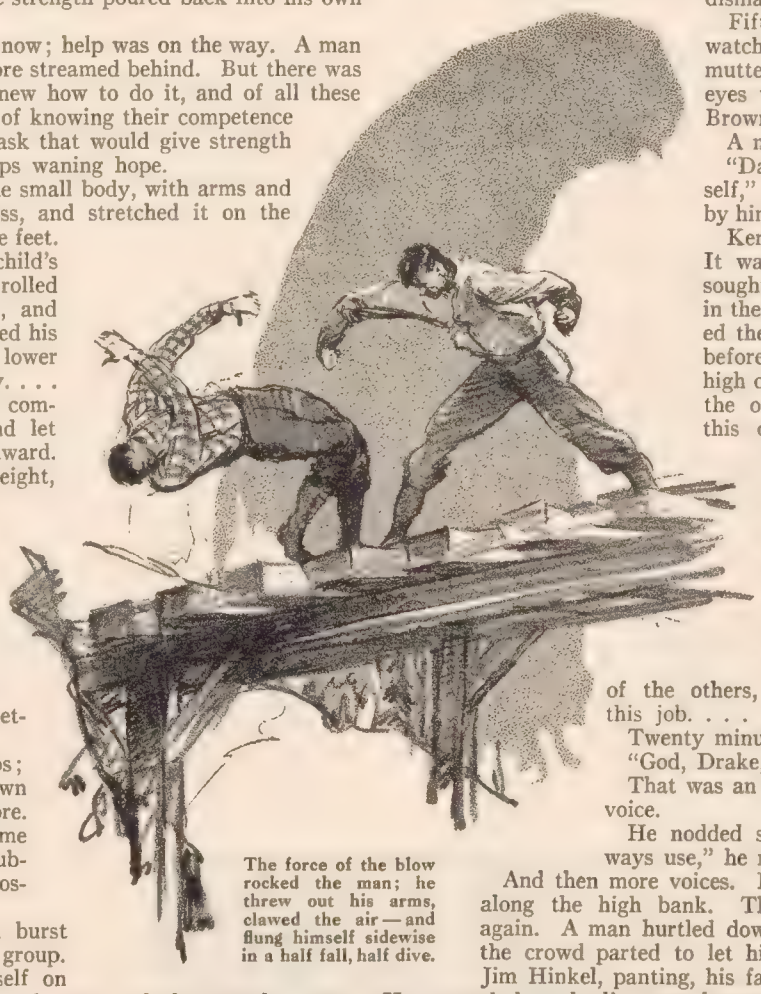
Kerry glanced sidewise. It was the man who had sought to drag him down in the depths. He had noted the black hair and eyes before. Now he saw the high cheek-bones and knew the one who had started this day spying on him, who had just now sought bunglingly to drown him, was a breed. Hot anger and wild suspicion wanted to rise but he choked them back. Time enough for this 'breed and Tod West and any of the others, after he had done this job. . . .

Twenty minutes.

"God, Drake, is it any use?"

That was an old man, tears in his voice.

He nodded simply. "There's always use," he muttered.



The force of the blow rocked the man; he threw out his arms, clawed the air—and flung himself sidewise in a half fall, half dive.

And then more voices. Figures were running along the high bank. The woman screamed again. A man hurtled down toward them, and the crowd parted to let him through. It was Jim Hinkel, panting, his face the color of suet. He stopped abruptly, lips parted, one hand swinging meaninglessly. His eyes, large and desperate with query, turned to Drake. This must be *his* child!

"Can't tell, Jim," Kerry replied to the unspoken question. "We *should* have an outside chance. And we won't quit!"

Another plucked at Hinkel's sleeve.

"Come away, Jim—it's best."

He shook off the kindly touch.

"D'ruther stay here," he muttered huskily, and then: "I—I can, can't I?"

"Sure thing," said Drake.

His shoulders and back ached. The inside of one knee had rubbed raw on the log. He asked for a coat and had it tucked beneath the knee. That helped a little—not much. It was nothing, though, compared to what Jim Hinkel was feeling!

And then, all of a sudden, Nan Downer was there, standing just inside the circle of men. One hand was at her

lips, and her eyes were dark with suspense. He smiled assurance at her as he worked. . . .

The little girl's hair was drying in the breeze now. Golden, it was, and in disarray about the small, motionless head. He lowered his face to her cheek, holding it close against the colorless lips—then sighed and started in again.

A full hour had passed since he carried her from the water. Now and again Jim looked at Drake, and his lips would twitch. Others were talking lowly, moving about, their tensity gone. Kerry could see shrugs and heads shaken. They had given up hope.

"Don't you think," Mel Knight, the storekeeper at the Landing, asked as he came close, "that it'd be as well—you see, they got to realize it sometime."

"No, we won't quit."

"But man, you can't keep on hangin' to hope—"

"Sh!"

He had just started the pressure, but relaxed it. He held his hand on the small back and turned his head, intently waiting for what he had thought he felt to repeat. Then he leaned low again, held so in a strained silence—and straightened quickly. Most gently, he bore down on the ribs, more slowly now, irregularly and after a moment dragged one stiffened leg from its position astraddle the log. Tenderly he lifted the child, swinging her about, placing her on her back, head higher than the feet. He bent to listen again, and all eyes held on him.

Then it came again—just the whisper of a cough!

"Careful, Jim! Steady, now!" He held the trembling father back with one arm, and began to chafe a wrist rapidly.

He beckoned Nan to him quickly.

"Get after the feet," he said quietly. "She's on her way!"

"You, Mel! Rustle up hot blankets and things."

Ten minutes later Kerry gave the moaning child into her father's arms and stood beside Nan, watching her carried tenderly away. The look on the mother's face, the vast relief and pride and thanksgiving which showed in the very set of Jim's shoulders, touched things within Drake. Nostrils smarted; his throat constricted and a mist came into his eyes.

The 'breed had turned to join the ragged procession moving up the bank.

"Who's the Injun?" he asked the girl, eyes following the great frame of the man, strength of which could not be concealed by the cotton shirt and faded overalls and moccasins.

"His name is Bluejay—Frank Bluejay," she answered; and then, as if pointedly: "Why?"

He shrugged. "He was spying on me from across the river this morning."

A gasp of dismay escaped her.

"Bluejay too! He's a bad citizen," she whispered. "My father used to say he believed him the cruelest man he had ever known. Everyone distrusts him except Tod West. He works for him, when he works."

A hard smile came into Drake's eyes and he nodded.

"When he works, eh?" he asked.

They parted then, Nan going toward the mill, Drake mounting the trestle abutment slowly.

"Hi, Bluejay!" he hailed.

The breed turned, standing on the ties, and lighting a cigarette.

"What you want?" he asked, with the accent of his race, and his look was clearly belligerent.

Drake did not answer until he had covered the distance between them. The Indian waited, giving him stare for stare. When, at arm's-length, Kerry stopped, he said quietly:

"I want to know this: why were you watching me from cover this morning? And when I've found that out, I'm going to ask you why you were fighting me under water down there?"

The cigarette dangled loosely from the other's lower lip, and now the upper one curled slightly, and he put his hands on his hips with a defiant gesture. The look in his eyes was truculent.

"Who's askin' that?" he asked. "You? Huh! I tell you; I say to you, it's none of your dam' business what I do!" He nodded slowly, head thrust forward. "I say somet'ing more to you, eh? I say these: you get to hell outta here before somet'ing very bad catch up with—"

He did not finish the threat. Sure of himself as a bad man well- and long-feared will be, he was unprepared for Kerry's lightning move. Drake's arms had been at his sides, but with that nod and the beginnings of that warning, a tremendous surge of rage swept him.

He swung sharply and stoutly, putting all his strength, from the soles of his feet to the open hand, into the swing. His palm caught Bluejay on the ear with a stinging smack; the force of the blow rocked the man, swayed him off balance. He threw out his arms, teetering on one foot; he clawed the air twice, writhed and strained an instant to get the other foot down in time, and failing, flung himself sidewise for the river in a half fall, half dive.

The impact of his body on the stream made a mighty splash. He came up immediately, shaking his eyes clear and treading water.

"Wh-what you t'ink you doin', eh?" he gasped. "What you—"

"I think I knocked you loose from yourself as a beginning!" Kerry said hotly. "And I'm standing here to wait for you to come up again! I'll knock you in as fast as you come up, Injun. . . . That is, if you come up on this side! If you want to keep out of trouble with me, you swim yourself across yonder and stay there! Get that? *Stay* there!"

"Ho! So you t'ink—"

With a defiant curse the man started swimming for shore, and Drake, hitching at his belt, followed slowly along the trestle, ready for a second encounter. But Bluejay had not gone far, looking upward at that dark and infuriated face when he hesitated, spat angrily and turned, striking out for West's Landing, swimming like an otter.

And at this surrender, all the bitterness drained out of Kerry's heart. The man had been so sure of himself, had looked so absurd in his fall, was so crestfallen in this moment. He began to shake with silent laughter, and the mirth broke into sound, and he was still chuckling when a trio who had seen from the bank moved toward him. . . .

Tip's roaring gave way to a high-pitched snarl. Kerry heard a thud, as of feet striking a boat, and a sloshing of water.

"What the devil comes off, Drake?" one asked, and his grin was far from unfriendly.

"Oh, the 'breed, he spoke a piece and then thought better of it. That's all!"

They turned now, and walked with him.

"I'll tell this part of the world you're goin' to be either dam' popular in this locality or you're goin' to be awful dam' onpopular!" another laughed.

The third asked: "D'you really mean it, about stickin' here?"

"Yes!" said Kerry. "I got a job and a flock of enemies to start with. A man with those properties has got to stay, hasn't he?"

"Well, you got somethin' besides them," the first said stoutly. "Yes sir, Mr. Drake, you got somethin' besides enemies! That sure was a man's job you done for Jim Hinkel and his woman. And as for Bluejay—wish t' the devil there'd been somebody here a long spell ago to knock the hell out of that scoundrel. But look out! He aint *much* Injun, but he's got enough of it in him never to forget!"

Across the river Tod West was listening to an account of what had happened to Jim's daughter, and he frowned as he made out the swimmer who surlily waded to the bank below him, looking over his shoulder malevolently.

CHAPTER IX

A JOB and some enemies, and at least the beginnings of some friendships.

Drake pondered those possessions as he spent a drizzly afternoon making his camp permanent. And after dark, as he sat in Nan Downer's office and talked to her and Holt Stuart, he wondered just where this quick-spoken, high-strung youth was going to fit in with his scheme of things.

Holt appeared to him as one who will normally come to rapid decisions—form, perhaps, snap judgments. And yet Kerry had the feeling that in his case the forester was holding back, reserving his estimate and opinion. The boy was not unfriendly, and yet showed no enthusiasm over the prospect of having Drake work for him. And when Kerry and Nan talked—and in truth, they had more to say that night than did Stuart—he saw that the other watched him narrowly.

When Holt's eyes rested on Nan, a hunger of long standing appeared in them. Not the lust that had been on Tod West's face yesterday afternoon, up river, but a clean, upright respect. . . . and something deeper than that.

It was late when Drake left, an agreement reached and ready to report in the morning to work at the big drafting board. He did not fancy office work, but the thought that Nan would be there, in the same room with him for, perhaps, a week, was sufficient compensation!

A light rain was falling, and after Nan had said her good-nights to Tip, with Stuart looking on as if, perhaps, he were even slightly jealous of the dog, he threw a balloon-silk slicker about his shoulders and walked away in the darkness.

He had not gone far when he felt Tip come a bit closer, and then a vague figure detached itself from the shadow of a pine tree. Drake, after the several things that had happened, was immediately ready for anything, but did not slacken his pace.

The hail, when it came, though cautious and low, was not unfriendly.

"Drake? That you, Drake?"

"Yo! What's up?"

The other approached and then Kerry halted.

"It's Jim Hinkel, Drake."

"Oh, hullo, Jim! How's the girl?"

"Fine! All right!"—looking about cautiously. "I—I wonder if I could git you to stop here a minute? I got somethin' I *got* to say to you, Drake!"

He was wholly sincere—and frightened; and not at all at ease. That belligerence which had been on display early in the morning was wholly gone.

"Well, when a man's got to talk—why, he's just got to talk, hasn't he? Won't you walk on down to my camp? We'd be snug—"

"Lord, no! You see, that wouldn't do, Drake. I—I don't want certain parties ever to know I hunted you up, friendly-like. I—can't we stand over here under this tree? Nobody could see us without bein' seen first. It won't take long."

"Why, sure thing, Jim."

They stood a moment beneath the tree before Hinkel spoke. Then he said doggedly, as one entering upon an ordeal:

"I'd be a skunk if I didn't say it, after what you done for us. I aint even thanked you yet for givin' Elsie back

to us." His voice shook. "That's all I can say about that—that I thank you. . . . A man can't say anything else when—it's his own kid, Drake."

"That's all right, Jim. You needn't even have said that much."

"Oh, yes! I had to say that. But that's the smallest part of it. I—I got other things to say, Drake."

He drew a deep breath and Kerry could feel rather than see the burning eyes on him.

"I'm no good, you know. I'm a hell of a citizen. I drink and I gamble and I don't pay attention to my debts like I ought. I don't amount to *nothin'*. But it's only when somethin' happens like happened today that I git thinkin' about it much.

"And I got this to say—because of the things I've been thinkin' this afternoon: I was lower'n a snake's belly to come to you like I did 'nd try to drive you out of this country!"

Pause.

"You mean,"—slowly,—"you mean that the warning or the threat or whatever it was you delivered to me was phony?"

"Oh, God, no! It's real enough, Drake. And I mean it, now, when I tell you you'd better haul. But what grinds me is that I—that I done what I done!"

"Hum! Now, let's get this straight. You didn't mean it this morning, but you do now?"

"Somethin' like that."

"Well, then: if it was a friendly act just now for you to try to send me on my way, why wasn't it a few hours ago?"

"You see it's different, now. I— That is, I come to you just after sunup like I—like I believed what the rest of 'em believe: that you framed up somethin' on Tod."

"And you knew all along that it was real? That he did cheat?"

Another pause. Then, "Yes!"—in a whisper.

SOMETHING unusual here; something it would be well to bring to light and examine, Kerry told himself.

"And you figure I am in danger now; and you figured the same way this morning. Then the change is all in you, Jim? In your—your attitude, I might say?"

"I guess that's gettin' clost to it."

Drake scratched his head and took a deep breath.

"It's a little deep for me," he laughed. "I must confess I don't understand what could have happened to make you feel low about giving me a warning you thought necessary for my own good, and—"

"Aint it what a man *thinks* that counts more than what he *does?*" In Hinkel's voice was a sort of passionate plea for understanding.

"Yes; I guess you're right."

"Well, then, when I come to you kind of play-actin', 'nd make you think that I don't know you done me a good turn last night; 'nd when I set out to make you think I'm unfriendly when I feel right friendly. . . . Why, aint that a hell of a way to act?

"You see, Drake,"—grasping the front of his slicker and looking quickly about,—"I didn't want to come to you today! I knew you caught Tod dealin' crooked, even if I didn't dare let on to him 'nd the rest. I knew you'd done me a big favor gettin' money back that I'd been beat out of; money I owed. But I had to make you think I didn't owe you anythin', had to make you think I was more friendly to Tod 'n I was to you. . . . That's what makes me feel like a skunk!"

"Oh, I see. . . . Yes, I see how it is. . . . So you had to make that play this morning! That it, Jim?"

Almost reluctantly, the man said: "Yes; that's it."

"I'd say that was a queer fix for a man to get himself into!"

"I told you I wasn't any good!"

"But you were wrong! You are some good; a lot of good, I'd say. If you weren't, you wouldn't be waiting for me here tonight to try to fix up what you've broke!"

"Well—it aint nothin'. It's all I can do."

DRAKE shook his head. "No, you can do quite a little more. You can tell me, for instance, why you thought it necessary to believe what West said instead of what your eyes told you."

"He amounts to a lot around here, Tod West does."

"But I thought you were working for Miss Nan, as a guide."

"I am. But he runs the country." A note of decided uneasiness was creeping into Hinkel's tone.

"And you don't dare cross him?"

"Not much . . . . God, Drake, if you only *knew!*"

"I'm here; I'm ready to listen."

"But I can't tell you! It's nothin' that concerns you. It's nothin' you know about."

He had started to back away. Drake, mind clicking smartly, realized that here was perhaps an outside chance to learn more of Tod West than he could learn from any other source. He pressed his advantage.

"It's something that concerns you, though, Jim. It's something that makes you—well, that keeps you under West's thumb? That it?"

"Or his heel!" The man's voice shook on that bitter ejaculation.

"And it's strong enough to make you disloyal not only to your friends but to yourself."

"Me? Hell, I don't matter!"

"But if you don't, you should. You've had a lot to think about today. You've made an about-face and have come clean with me on one detail. Now wouldn't it be the smart thing to carry right on? To put yourself in a position where you could look any man in the eye and say what you think and feel?"

Jim laughed harshly. "As if I could! And what if I tried?"—desperately. "What if I tried? You think I want to find myself locked up and—"

His intentness had overridden his best judgment and on that he clapped a hand to his mouth.

"Go on, Jim! Locked up? For what?" The man was adamant, refused to talk and gently, firmly, Kerry began arguing, urging for confidence, playing on the fundamental decency in Jim Hinkel's heart.

"I can't! I can't!" he burst out. "You don't know Tod West! Why, to get what he wants he'd as soon charge an innocent man with murder as not! There! I've said it!"

"Murder?"

"Yes, murder! If I'd try to get out of doin' what he wants me to do, they'd have me in jail like that,"—snapping his thumb,—"and charged with killin' Miss Nan's father!"

And now Kerry Drake stood most rigidly, a little tingle running his spine.

"But you were suspected, weren't you? I've heard the story."

"Yes, I was. And if it wasn't for Tod West, then Nat Bridger, the sheriff, 'd've took me sure as hell!"

"But when Tod told them he played cards with you—"

"That settled it."

"And if you had been playing cards with him all that evening— Then why has he got anything on you?"

A long moment of tense silence followed.

"Because all I know about what happened that night is what Tod told me," said Hinkel at last.

Drake gave a long-drawn, "Oh-h-h!" After a moment he added: "So *that's* it!"

"Yes, that's it!"—desperately. "That's it, and he's bearin' down on me 'nd holdin' it over me like a club! He's makin' me do things like I done today because of it!"

"That sounds goofy, Jim. He alibied you out of suspicion. He's on record with his story, isn't he?"

"But a man with his standin' can admit that he told a certain kind of lie 'nd get away with it, can't he? He could go to 'em 'nd say that he didn't think, at the time, I had anything to do with th' killin', so he went to the front for me; but that it's worried him since and that things've happened to make him believe that, mebby, I might not be as straight as he thought I was last November. He could do that, couldn't he?"

"Yes, he could; of course, he could. But how would that put you in wrong with the sheriff?"

"All he'd have to tell 'em," Jim said tensely, "was what he swears to me 's the 'truth 'nd they'd put it on me just as sure as hell!"

"You mean that you weren't at his house that night? That you didn't play cards with him that evening?"

"I stayed there, sure enough. Leastwise, I woke up there. But when I come in, I dunno; what I'd done before that, I dunno; 'nd if I played cards, I dunno that, either!"

"Good Lord, Jim, that doesn't sound so good, does it? What was it that really happened?"

The man drew a tremulous sigh. "Damned if I know; that is, what happened between 'bout sundown that night and the next mornin'—I don't know any more about that 'n you do, Drake. The devil of it is that it all ties in to make it look awful bad for me.

"You see, I'd had a run-in with Cash the day before. He wasn't an easy man to work for; we'd had a run-in and he fired me 'nd got pretty rough about it, which was his way. A job was a job and I figured I'd had a raw deal 'nd didn't know what I was goin' to do last winter—and I lost my head. I told him I'd get back at him some way, and a lot of others heard me.

"I was broke. It was just the time when deer-hunters was comin' in to make their camps just before the season opened. A lot of 'em allus stop at the Landin' to buy their grub. I hired out to four of 'em to pick out a good campin' spot and to work up firewood for 'em. That was only a day's work, but a day's work was a day's work with me. I took my rifle along 'cause I thought mebby I might knock a buck over 'nd then get a chance to sell it to some sport who couldn't fill his own license. Ag'in' the law, sure; but I was broke."

HE paused and looked about and listened, and then went on in a low, rapid mumble.

"Well, I got 'em set, all right, up on Big Beaver. They was good lads and paid me well; they had a lot of booze and give me a bottle, and I started back on foot 'bout sundown for the Landin', and that's the last I know until mornin', when I woke up in Tod's.

"He woke me up, see? He was standin' over me and lookin' down and smilin', and it wasn't a smile to make a man feel good.

"He told me, then, that Cash'd been killed. He just said that: 'Cash was murdered last night.' And then he asked: 'Where was you, Jim?' He was pleasant enough but he had a look in his eyes he'd never had before and I want to tell you his grin went through me like a knife!

"I didn't *know* where I'd been, Drake. I knew I'd been wanderin' round somewhere with a rifle. I knew I'd been awful dam' mad at Cash. I—I just didn't know!"

Hinkel strained to swallow, his breath quick and audible.

"I lost what little head I had, I guess. I went down on my knees to him; I begged him to tell me where I'd been, how I come there. I was scared, I tell you!

"He told me to brace up. He didn't know where I'd been, he said. He'd found me wanderin' along the switch late in th' evenin'. Just happened to step outside, he said, thinkin' he heard somebody call, and I was tryin' to light my pipe and fell down. He saw the match, see? And he come down there and found me, passed out.

"Nobody knows just when Cash was killed but, as West tells it, that was probably some little time afterwards. He set there and figured it all out. The ground was froze hard as iron; there wasn't any snow except in the timber. Whoever did the job left no sign, and if it wasn't told around that I'd been out alone, drunk, and with a loaded rifle, nobody'd suspect me. So he said he was always ready to go to the front for a friend, and framed up a story 'bout my playin' cribbage with him—in his room, upstairs, where he had a stove. He told me he'd been readin' there all evenin' and had a light in the room. Others seen that, too; they told about it afterwards, backin' up Tod's story. My woman and kids was away; her mother was sick. It was an airtight story. But—it all depended on Tod West!"

KERRY'S mouth was a bit dry. The significance, the possible implications of this confession, put him in a fever. He doubted that even Jim Hinkel was aware of what he revealed. Nor was the man. He burst out, now:

"I aint no killer, Drake! I never wanted to hurt a man, serious. I've figured and figured over this thing. It's most drove me crazy sometimes! I was pret' sore at Cash but— God, Drake, I wouldn't've killed him, sober; I wouldn't've done it!"

He ran an unsteady hand over his face.

"And no one knows that you did."

"But they don't know I *didn't;* and if the straight of it—'bout where I was—ever got round, you can bet Nat Bridger'd jail me quicker'n a wink! He comes up for election next fall; folks've been pret' sore because he didn't make out a case ag'in' somebody for the Downer killin'.

"And that aint all! It's the most of it, the worst of it; but since he's kept me out of that kind of trouble, Tod West aint ever forgot for a minute that I owe my liberty to him. Once, last spring, he made me sign some paper as a witness and it was dated 'way back. I never knew what the deal was. I didn't want to do it, but he asked me then what I thought 'd happen if he went to Nat and said he'd lied about the night of the Downer murder. Course, I signed.

"And last night he told me if I didn't come down to you and run you out of the country he'd tell Nat the truth. So what could I do, me bein' in the fix I am?"

"Yes, what could you do?" echoed Drake.

"Why, 'most everybody believes that Tod West's one of the biggest men in the State. D'you think last night they'd look them cards over to see if your story 'bout a bent corner was right? Not one! That's how they think of him! And they was all sore at you. But today, when you done what you done for me, and later, when you knocked Bluejay into the drink—why, some of 'em's commenced to respect you, kinda.

"But what *I've* found out 's this: Tod West aint the tin saint we've thought him. Course, he's in a pinch; times is bad; he's got a lot of property that aint bringin' him in a cent. Mebby that paper I signed was crooked; likely it was. Even a straight man gits tempted when times is bad. But I dunno. . . . Tod West didn't talk to me last night like a man who had much good left in him!

"And another thing: was you foolin' this mornin' 'bout somebody watchin' from acrost the river?"

"No. Bluejay was there."

"Bluejay!" Pause. "I wonder—mebby he had him spyin' on *me* to see if I done what he'd ordered me to. . . . That breed's a bad man."

"I notice that men with reputations for being so awfully bad don't always live up to it when their bluff's called good and hard."

"You want to watch him, though. That's another thing I wanted to tell you."

Drake, with a host of ideas and theories and suspicions crowding his mind, wanted to be alone, now.

"It's fine of you to act this way, Jim," he said. "I'm not going to forget it. And don't you worry. I'm going to be here for—for quite a while, perhaps. Who knows what'll develop? About the best thing that you could have done for your own good was to tell some one just what you've told me tonight."

"You won't whisper it?"

"Not to a soul!"

Hinkel drew a breath of relief.

"Well, I'll be gone, then. I—I'll see you again. And about Elsie—God, Drake, you'll never know!"

CHAPTER X

NOW as Kerry Drake walked on alone through the fine rain, that mental snarl which Jim Hinkel's confession had occasioned straightened out into this simple fact:

If Jim had not a lawyer-proof alibi to absolve him from suspicion in the Downer matter, then the whereabouts of Tod West on that fateful night were also open to speculation.

Hinkel was no killer. Despite the man's misgivings of self, Kerry was convinced that, drunk or sober, he would will no serious harm to even his worst enemy. Why, tonight, with all his fear of West, he had expressed no violent thought!

And last night, Ezra had said, the first piece of money from the Downer loot had made its appearance; had made its appearance in a poker game where Tod West was present.

He stood still, digesting these simple but perhaps astounding implications.

Tip, at his side, was staring at the river below them and he felt the animal quiver slightly. Something floated past, a blob on the vaguely shimmering stream; a log, an old snag, perhaps. . . . He had no time to speculate idly.

If West had not played cribbage with Hinkel, he might have been anywhere that November evening. If West were in possession of the money for which Cash Downer had been murdered, that would be a fact he must explain.

And, added to these, was this item: that Tod West had been going armed for no one knew how long!

His heart beat smartly but he chuckled to himself even in that moment of tensity. What a prank of fate this was! Here was Tod West, who had warped and misshapen his life; who was plainly guilty of an attempt to bring unhappiness and financial distress to the one woman that he, Kerry Drake, had ever found strongly appealing. And, on the other hand, here he was, a coroner's deputy, with a vague finger of suspicion commencing to train itself on this same Tod West . . . .

He walked on after that motionless interval, recalling things that Ezra had said last night. The old physician had the bullet which had slain Nan's father. A thirty-eight, he had said—a thirty-eight, and last night he had held West's automatic in his own hand, had ejected cartridges from it. He had given no heed to the size but, thinking back, they were no larger, at least, than a thirty-eight.

"Slow, now," he told himself aloud. "He's no monkey!"

Slow, yes. West's suspicions of Ezra's activity must not be aroused. And another thing: it was as important to locate that money, were it still in the country, as it was to pin the guilt of murder on the individual who had taken Cash Downer's life.

If he could determine the caliber of that pistol, for instance; if he could get possession of it and send it and the bullet to a crime-detection laboratory where ballistic experts could determine whether or not it was the weapon which had done murder. . . . That, he knew, would not be conclusive evidence. But it would tell him whether or not his hatred for West had been too great an influence. It might be, he reasoned, that his loathing for the man was forcing him to faulty conclusions—

He came to an abrupt halt, there on the bank above his camp. He cocked his head, for from below he thought he detected sounds. Tip did not stop. He slowed his trot to a walk and the walk stiffened; the dog crept forward silently a few paces and then Kerry heard the beginnings of a growl form in that deep chest.

"Careful!" he whispered—but too late!

The dog was gone, down the bank, crashing through the poplars, a ragged roar of rage heralding his approach.

Kerry poised there an instant longer. It might be some prowling animal only, but when Tip's roaring gave to a high-pitched snarl, when he heard a man's voice gasp an inarticulate exclamation, when he heard heavy footsteps running—why, then he ran too.

He was too late to catch the intruder on his camp. As he reached the flat he heard a thud, as of feet striking a boat, and a sloshing of water, and then Tip was barking madly, and a paddle was dipping in rapid cadence, and a dark blotch was moving across the stream for the black wall of swamp timber.

"Come in, Tip!" he commanded. "Stop it! Come in!"

He wanted to listen and squatted there, an arm around the trembling, whimpering, but obedient dog, straining his ears to catch further sounds. But the hiss of heavier rain swallowed them and he could hear no more of the prowler than he could see.

TIP stopped whining and commenced pawing at his mouth. His tongue worked briskly as if trying to rid his paws of something stuck there. Drake explored with a hand, found a ragged bit of fabric caught in the strong teeth and disengaged it.

"You *almost* got him, chum!" he chuckled. "Almost but not—"

"*Oh*—oh! What've we got here?"

He stepped into the closed tent and brought a flash-light from his pocket.

"Blue corduroy!" he muttered after a glance at the cloth. "Blue cor—" He stopped short.

Tod West wore blue corduroy breeches!

"So!" he said to himself. "He sends Jim here, under threat, to drive me out. Likely, he sets the breed to do whatever he can and the first thing he tries to do is drown me! And now he comes himself! Why, the dirty scum!"

He stepped outside again, trembling with that rage which comes to a man who meets his enemies face to face and in the open when he is assailed in darkness and from behind!

"The dirty scum!" he muttered again. "And now he'll go home—and, by the Lord Harry, I'll be there to force him into something he don't like worth a damn!"

This vivid story of the North Woods reaches a thrilling climax in the next, the July, issue.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Sinews of War" describes certain extraordinary episodes in the background of recent events in Asia—and probably explains at least one sudden change of front.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by A. E. Briggs

QUITE a sum has been spent upon one of the Oriental Embassies in London during the past year or two in order to make it fairly representative of the World Power behind it—and the staff increased until it is larger than any of the others. On the evening of March 4th the Ambassador, from his carved ebony chair behind the desk in his luxuriously fitted study, had been glancing searchingly over the faces of the four Secret Service men who stood respectfully awaiting his instructions. There was no evidence in his facial expression that he was not entirely at ease; but his fellow Orientals before him sensed a certain perturbation—with no solution of the problem in sight. Finally he spoke—slowly, intensely:

"You will listen—closely—and speak at once if you do not understand. Since the League began meddling with purely Eastern questions which do not concern it in the least, a condition appears to be slowly arising which, unchecked, might stifle our very existence. To our amazement, we suddenly find it extremely difficult to obtain necessary financing, anywhere. It begins to have the appearance of concerted action upon the part of private individuals—the League so far having taken no action against us, or even seeming likely to. Understood—so far? You will have heard the name of Sir Charles Tenterdon mentioned as being one of the world's leading financiers. His junior partners relieve him from the daily activities of their great banking-house, but the man himself controls a group of financiers able to float government loans of almost any amount—that is, where his own banking-house deals in millions, he figures in thousands of millions. His English home—one of the most attractive in the United Kingdom—lies on the farther side of Buckinghamshire, less than an hour's drive from this Embassy. We have received a hint that there is to be a conference there tomorrow evening among six or eight men of the same financial power and standing as Sir Charles himself. Such a conference could scarcely fail to touch upon our affairs, with others—it is absolutely necessary that we know what decisions are reached, and who are present. If you attempt to spot the cars and their chauffeurs as they arrive, you take the chance that the guests will intentionally use different cars and drivers from those usually associated with them—and it would be almost impossible for you to get anywhere near the house-entrance when they are leaving the cars. I think your best plan would be to get into a distant part of the estate tonight and get the general layout; then conceal yourselves, if possible, and get into the house through a cellar-window tomorrow,—or get in any way you can,—and conceal yourselves inside the house. The grounds are likely to be closely patrolled tomorrow night—but probably not during the day. Use your own best judgment, of course—and remember that the Emperor bestows attractive rewards upon those who serve him well. On the other side—well, those who fail become 'men without a country', even if nothing worse happens to them. I think I need not say more. Our situation at present is a most serious one—keep that in mind. Draw whatever expense-money you need, at the Embassy Office below. Now go!"

As Sir Charles Tenterdon and his family do considerable entertaining, it aroused no comment when neighboring villagers saw the big manor-house lighted up next evening and a string of handsome private cars driving in through the lodge-gates on the Aylesbury Road.

The house-party was not a formal one—considerably smaller than usual, in fact—but to anyone in the "know" it might have seemed a bit dynamic. Of the sixteen at the dinner-table, the Marquess and Marchioness of Lyonesse, with their son Lord Salcombe, are financially interested in so many banking and other enterprises that any business activity of theirs has a far-reaching effect. Lucius Grootz of Hamburg controls ten great banking-houses. Lord Comynge is the English partner in a European banking syndicate. Armand Lecouvrier controls a number of French and colonial banks. Count Minelli of Rome is financing his Government and a number of other enterprises. Each of these men—accompanied by a wife, daughter or niece—was as much of an influence in American banking circles as in European. It was Mademoiselle Lecouvrier who, with the soup, started general laughter around the table with a naïve remark:

"But considering, messieurs, the weight of your collecteeve armor an' deesplacement, eet does seem to me that you are not so diff'rent from othair men in appearance. *Non!* You 'ave *l'air du gentilhomme,* of course—you 'ave ze *bon* valeting—ze appearance t'at you enjoy good food. But you do not in the leas' resemble colossi! *Non!* Governing committee of ze Jockey Club—*oui.* Senators—*Membres du Cabinet—peut etre.* But not ze Krupp gun in financial affair'—*non!*"

When some one around the table asked her if she were not grossly exaggerating the importance of the very humble specimens of humanity around her, the rosy lips puckered in a soundless "O-o-o-o!"

"I think eef some grreat commercial enterprise did ask one of you gentlemen for a hundred meellions—an' ze gentleman thought eet might geeve eet ze financial colic—he would say 'no' in ze voice so harrd like ze marble statue. *Au contraire*—if ze gentleman think t'at enterprise 'ave sometheen' good conceal'—he would wave ze han' weeth ze cigarette an' say: 'You should not play ze piker game, m'sieu—why not *five hundred meellions?* See me at ten, tomorrow—weeth ze papers.' And, messieurs—t'at ees why eet strike me as so odd t'at you 'ave no appearance of any-t'ing like t'at. I could introduce any one of you as automobile *fabricant*—American Senator—famous orchestra leader—an' nobody would show doubt or surprise."

"Eef they prove too obstinate—well, they weel be eliminated as obstacle to our government."

Later, when the men had adjourned to Tenterdon's library for cigars and coffee—the massive doors being closed and bolted—they had another laugh at Mademoiselle's frank description. Lord Comynge glanced around at his companions with an appraising grin, as he said:

"Fancy the girl hit us off about right, at that! Some of us a bit on the bald side—three white-heads—couple more with a bit of gray on the temples. Might be heads of coöperative stores or news-sheet owners. . . . Wonder how much influence we really could exert, if we put the pressure on? Rather int'restin' point to speculate on! What? I say, Tenterdon, can anything be overheard from this room—outside?"

"No—the room was soundproofed when I overhauled the house, even to the ventilating-ducts and chimney. Double windows. Air-space between walls, floor and ceiling," replied Sir Charles reassuringly. "Whenever there is occasion for it, I have a force of twenty picked men in chauffeurs' uniforms policing the grounds—in fact, the entire estate. Four men claiming to be reporters got in this morning—three were found concealed about the house and cellars. But we combed every corner of the place before you arrived, and even if we missed one—which we didn't—he couldn't get a glimpse around the rooms on this floor or overhear a word. I'm a magistrate, myself—we're all a bit on the severe side here in Bucks when it comes to burglars or spies. These four will do a stretch of two or three years on charges of espionage an' trespassing. Two of 'em, I'd say, are Russian Eurasians—one a German, apparently, and one an Oriental. All Secret Service, undoubtedly. These windows, by the way, are all of laminated glass—can't smash or fire through 'em. . . . Well—that disposes of your question, Comynge. We're quite safe here. Er—you were speculatin' on how much influence we could exert if we put the pressure on. What's your opinion, Marquess?"

"Never has been tested out, that I can recall—at least not to a definite show-down. Why not try it? Here's opportunity—ready to hand. I'm not so sure just how far economic pressure can be carried, as the business world is now constituted—but there's one thing certain: We've got to find out sooner or later—I figure it can't be too soon. At present, there isn't a political influence in the wide world to prevent a recurrence of the German war with all its horrors—and something of the sort has simply got to be found! If civilization is to go on existing, a means must be developed to keep wars within reasonable limits. I'm of the impression that a certain Asiatic nation can be checked right where she is now. Perhaps I'm wrong—but it's full time the point was tested out!"

"Er—they're getting ready to float a long-time bond issue. Have intimated that Garrod's, Limited, will probably underwrite it. But I heard this afternoon that Garrod's has refused absolutely. Do you know anything about that, Marquess? Is it true?"

"Oh—quite. Garrod's isn't having any."

"H-m-m—put 'em in rather a delicate position, refusin', I fancy."

"I don't see why. The Minister of Finance was told flatly, that in the present status of their military operations—which are held to be inexcusable by the outside world—such a loan would have to be forced on the market at a heavy discount below par. That's unsatisfactory for them to start with; and if they eventually become hopelessly insolvent it's not an attractive sort of loan for any banking-house to handle. Garrod's won't touch it. If any of you gentlemen do, you'll eventually get stung—have to pour further loans into a bottomless rat-hole."

"Mean to say you'd stop loaning 'em altogether?"

"Oh, no. Finance cannot afford either prejudice or vindictiveness. Under reasonable conditions, I'd lend 'em a lot. But I wouldn't start lending until every one of their men, munitions, guns an' ships are back inside their own territory—with pretty strong guarantees that they'll keep off their neighbor's land—out of ports. If they insist upon going on with their present campaign of conquest I'd swing a good many millions over to help their adversaries, but not one penny—not one ounce of coal, iron, saltpeter or food—to this lot until they give assurances that they'll behave themselves. I believe that two or three initial moves with real teeth in them—refusals that *mean* 'no'—would have an effect that'll surprise you a good deal."

Lucius Grootz rolled a fat cigar from one corner of his thick lips to the opposite one.

"Trouble iss—ve start somet'ing undt pefore long it puts Sondermann Prothers in a ticklish bosition. Vell—ve got not'ing against der Sondermanns, haf ve?"

"H-m-m—not so sure about that, Lucius. Within three months after the League voted in the economic boycott clause as a last resort, the Sondermanns began buying parcels of land along the Chilean coast—saltpeter and sodium-nitrate properties and sulphur deposits—erecting immense warehouses connected by their own spur-railway to their port and long pier, sheltered by a breakwater that cost 'em two millions. The idea being, as they've cynically admitted, to maintain a source of supply for belligerents entirely outside of the League—to accommodate any Power the League may boycott. Well, that isn't as much of a menace as it sounds—because the Sondermanns are obliged to do business on a cash basis—they're not accepting bonds or securities at a discount. If we cramp those Asiatics for available cash, the Sondermanns stop selling to 'em, d'ye see. There's another side to it, however, which is more a matter of concern to every banking-house on the globe. They've declared their intention of developin' until they're independent of any bankers whatever. And they've started plunging—buying up coal, iron, tinned food an' equipm'nt properties all over the place—concentratin' 'em down on their Chilean ground which they own outright an' which doesn't come under Chilean jurisdiction—practically a little independent State like Liechtenstein. We've had reports that, just now, they're seriously over-extended in spite of their supposed capitalization. Well—I don't know that I'd object much to a show-down which would indicate whether such a concern ever can be independent of the outside banking world or not. Of course Lucius' group in Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin have been financing the Sondermanns—and he doesn't like the idea of smashing them. But even if we do they'll reorganize—it'll only be a temporary set-back. Yet it will give us pretty valuable data on whether financial pressure is nothing but theory or has real weight to it. What?"

Count Minelli had been following the discussion reflectively.

"I rather incline toward accord with Lucius, signori—but I've an open mind. I will subscribe to whatever the others decide. *Si.*"

THE Marquess, lounging comfortably in his chair beside the table, was easily the most distinguished-looking personage in the room. He was six or eight years the senior of the next man in age—but had not yet begun to stoop. His temples were gray, but blended into fine dark-brown hair which gave him the appearance of a much younger man. In fact, he might have passed as an elder brother of his own handsome son at the foot of the table—and he now smilingly suggested that they come to a general agreement in a simple, amusing way:

"What we're discussing, gentlemen, is I suppose a rather far-reaching and serious matter—but there's no reason why we need deal with it as such. Why not make it a sporting proposition? Supposing we play poker for a couple of hours—stopping on the stroke of one o'clock, and agreeing to abide by the decision of the highest winner. Eh—what?"

"By jove, Marquess, that's an idea! Relieves us from all the strain of decidin' between what every one of us knows we ought to do, or stallin' along until some later an' prob'ly less advisable time. But—why not the two highest winners?"

"Suppose they're on opposite sides? Deadlock!"

"That hadn't occurred to me. Very good—I agree."

Ringing for an unbroken deck of cards, and for chips, they started playing just as they sat around the table. As Lord Salcombe is Chairman of the Board of Garrod's, Limited—and as such represented a duplication of the Trevor interests—he and their host stayed out of the game, looking on, which left five players, the ideal number for any real game of poker, inasmuch as it splits the mathematical possibilities in dealing so that the chances are better for good hands.

Glancing around the circle of faces—peering up into the soft brown shadows of the oak-paneled walls and ceiling above and beyond them—Salcombe and Sir Charles were impressed with a feeling of stark, dynamic drama. Five men, middle-aged to elderly, playing one of the most intriguing games ever invented—for what almost amounted to the political existence of a proud Asiatic people, who up to the past six weeks had considered themselves invincible as a military power. Here in this lovely old room there were no blueprints of siege-guns, bombing planes or battleships—merely the soft click of ivory chips, a fluttering purr of cards being shuffled, the gurgling of a bottle as glasses were refilled. In the Orient—rotting, shell-torn fields covered with mangled casualties in tens of thousands; in Buckinghamshire—youth, maturity and age pitting brains and the ultimate coercive force against the destructive elements in an effort to test out the compelling supremacy of one or the other.

IT has been told of "Buffalo Bill" Cody that usually, when asked to sit in at a poker-game, he divided his winnings among the players at the end of it on the ground that they really were not in his class. So also George Trevor, Marquess of Lyonesse, might have been noted for the same gesture—had it not been for the fact that in some circumstances his life might depend upon an adversary's ignorance of his skill. It was not that he ever manipulated the cards unless he knew that his opponents were doing it first—but he had the uncanny instinct common to all really phenomenal poker-players of projecting himself into the brains of his companions and, if such a thing is possible, reading them. He watched not only their faces, but particularly the fingers which held their cards and the way they smoked their cigars. He never picked up his own cards to glance at them until the draw got around to him—and by that time, had a pretty close idea of what each man had caught on the deal. To create an impression of reckless ill-judged playing, he often permitted himself to be called on a pair of deuces—but when the man with a full house raised him, he usually had fours of one sort or another. . . .

At one in the morning the Marquess and Lucius Grootz were the heaviest winners—but he was some three hundred pounds ahead of the German, who philosophically drew his thick lips into an expansive grin, lighted another fat cigar—and said:

"Vell—dot vass dot! Ve do nodt lendt anot'er mark or shilling to t'ose Asiatic customers until t'ey vass off t'e mainlandt altoget'er mit t'eir men undt t'eir guns. *Nein!* Undt we see what happens. *Ja!*"

Grootz returned to Hamburg on the morning plane from Croydon. Next evening, he received a call from Johann, the second of the Sondermann Brothers. They had been classmates at Bonn, and naturally, were unceremonious when they met. Neither could have put on much "dog" with the other and got away with it, though Grootz could have bought and sold the Sondermann outfit ten times over, had there been sufficient incentive. After chatting for an hour or more, Johann said in their native German:

"Looks like we should have more working capital, Lucius,—say twenty-five millions, by Saturday."

"Better call in your Sasebo collections—we've had none of those payments coming through our banks for the last month or more," Grootz advised. "Hmph! . . . They must owe you at least fifteen millions, now!"

"Nearer twenty—can't imagine what's holding us up. It'll come in a lump when we get it, of course, and that'll ease up the pressure—but we've got to have money by Saturday—been buying a lot of isolated plants. If we don't meet the payments agreed upon, we lose 'em—and we need them in our business."

"Look here, Johann—are you *sure* you can get your money on the Sasebo contracts? As I understand it, they were mostly field-artillery, machine-guns and tinned food. Well, have you made all the deliveries contracted for—to date?"

"We will have—in ten days. There are five N. Y. K. boats and three Osaka Shosen Kaisha ones now lying at our long Quellimare pier on the Chilean coast. When we load them we're up to date."

"Don't put a single pound of cargo into them until you've got the twenty millions now due! I don't see where that crowd are going to get the money for you—certainly not in Europe or the States!"

"H-m-m—you really mean that, Lucius? Well—you let us have twenty-five millions by Saturday and we'll collect what's owing us—sooner or later."

"That's just the point. We want you to put the pressure on that Asiatic crowd right now! You're in a tight place, Johann—you can't get one reichsmark out of us at present, because you're over-extended and you're a rotten risk. You need money—desperately. Well—put the pressure on where it is owing you—don't ship 'em another pound until they pay or get off the mainland altogether. Put it up to them straight—in just those words!"

THERE were beads of perspiration on Sondermann's face; he was not exactly scared, but was thinking hard.

"I say, Lucius—when did all this happen? . . . This sudden decision to shut down on the Eastern customers? Seems like *donnerblitz* out of a clear sky!"

Grootz began to shake with chuckling laughter.

"It was comedy, Johann—you'd have said so yourself! Seven respectable, well-bred gentlemen, with their wives and daughters, at a country-house in Bucks. After a perfect dinner—(*himmel*, such a dinner!)—those nice everyday gentlemen go into the library for smoke, and talk—perhaps a game of something. The Asiatic question comes up. All are more or less in accord upon the theory that pressure should be applied, but most all rather blinking the idea of doing it just now—stalling, in fact. Then one of them suggests making it a sporting proposition—play poker for two hours—heaviest winner decides. Just as simple as that. You see?"

"Who suggested the sporting proposition?"

"Oh, come now! . . . One isn't supposed to give away the occurrences at a secret conference! Still, I can't see that any blame can possibly attach to a suggestion of that sort—leaving the decision entirely to chance. No more to his advantage than anyone else's—merely who got the best cards—that's all—and I was sufficiently intrigued to notice that every time the final winner did get a big hand, it was on some other chap's deal. No possible chance for collusion, either. It was Lyonesse who won—and of course that settled it. We all had agreed to abide by the winner's decision."

"Hmph! . . . Rather colossal stakes for a friendly game of cards, Lucius. And Sondermann Brothers appear to be the innocent by-standers who crash! Well, if we do go down, we'll have the fun of building up another and bigger company to make a monkey of the League!"

We who notice well-dressed Asiatics going through the city streets in handsome cars or taxies—or walking hurriedly along the sidewalks of the business neighborhoods with masklike faces which smile but mean nothing by it when they do—fail to grasp the impression that there seems to be more activity among such people at one time than another. But during the first three weeks of March, scurrying ants coming and going from the opening of a nest would have been a dignified pageant compared to the under-surface movements of one Oriental race in particular. At first, there were merely exchanges of courteous visits between ambassadors—members of their Treasury Department—and the financiers who control the money market—tentative conversations as to the sort of government loans which were likely to be popular with the general public. Then there was talk of loans secured by mortgages on government lands and manufacturing. Then—every banker of this Asiatic race in the world-capitals spent his days interviewing the managers of every sort of banking-houses. But none of them could borrow, or procure in any way, more than a few scattering thousand yen. A week after Sondermann's interview with Lucius Grootz, Lord Comynge and Sir Charles Tenterdon were dining in Park Lane with the Marquess of Lyonesse and his family—discussing with them an unexpected development in the situation.

"Of course there has been, right along, the chance that some little syndicate of third-rate banking-houses might take the risk of advancing a possible fifteen or twenty millions to the Sondermanns if the latter scraped up anything which could be considered fair security. A mortgage on one of their big nitrate deposits might not be unattractive—I fancy they're big enough gamblers to risk something like that on the chance that any collections from the Sasebo contracts would be ample to take up such a mortgage, and not entirely convinced that we can keep the lid down tight enough to prevent the Asiatics from getting any money. Then, it would be possible for that lot to get a small loan subscribed among their own people—enough to pay the Sondermanns—if they want to risk draining their country of the cash under present conditions. However, I doubt if they're fools enough to do it. Anyhow—there seems to be a chance that the Sondermanns may get a possible fifteen millions in the States within the next two weeks—or in Argentina. If they do—well—they'll load those eight big cargo-boats at their pier, an' there's enough stuff in those shipm'nts to keep at least three more divisions of troops in China pretty well through the summer—"

"Hmph! . . . Two weeks, eh? Fancy they'd begin to load before they got the loan?"

"No—they're not that sort of fools!"

"NOW I wonder!" said the Marquess reflectively. "Something a bit odd cropped up today. Of course I've met Johann Sondermann half a dozen times—he's in one of my clubs. But we've never got far enough to exchange social amenities—possibly just happened that way, for I've nothing against the man, personally. Understand he's a fine musician—with a wonderful organ in his Surrey house. Well, d'ye see—my secretary fetches me a very courteous invitation from him to Ivo an' myself for dinner at his Surrey place tomorrow evening—to meet an' have a business conference with Baron Tatashima, an American Senator and a Wall Street banker. Just on a hunch, I called up my friend Senator Howlands of Pennsylvania, in Washington, an' asked him to check up on the Senate. He said that at three o'clock this afternoon—just before dinner, here—not one of the United States Senators was in Europe. There were but four absentees at roll-call, and

he'd got in touch with each of them. So I'm wondering just who the gentleman may be who is pinch-hitting for the American Senator at Sondermann's dinner."

"Might be an ex-Senator—they retain the title, you know. That would be simple enough."

"Aye—quite so. But the invitation gave the impression that the man was now in office an' would talk on that basis—"

"Hmph! . . . Fishy proposition, if you ask me! You found some reasonable excuse for declinin', I fancy?"

"Declining the dinner—aye. We don't fancy absorbin' drugs at the start, d'ye see. But what sticks in my crop is the inference that there must have been a leak from our conference at your house, Sir Charles. That it has reached Sondermann—that he has passed it on to Tatashima and the other men. I don't for one moment insinuate that such a leak came either from you or Comynge—don't believe it could have come from Lecouvrier, because all three of you know that such a thing shouldn't have happened—not only dangerous, but it might defeat all our efforts toward pressure. Anyhow—I've sent word that we'll get there by nine for the conference—can't make the dinner."

"Too risky, Marquess—don't do it!"

"Well — consider! We've no means of knowing, just now, whether our pressure is successful or not. Tatashima knows very well that several of his nobility are supposed to be old friends of ours. If nothing happens at Sondermann's, it's a pretty good indication that our efforts are not seriously bothering them. If they kidnap an' confine us somewhere—they're unquestionably in a serious position. If they even suggest eliminatin' us—they're just about desperate—no blinkin' the fact. An' that, d'ye see, is knowledge we've simply got to get, even at some risk. If they mean to eliminate us ultimately, they could do that on the London streets—so I fancy we'll be in no great danger for a day or so."

"Tomorrow we ask you to comply weeth our requ es'. Eef you say 'no'—t'en water come in t'e beeg pipe, all night—higher and higher. Soon you mus' swim!"

Jean Wallington, who was present at all family dinners, had been closely following what was said—and now asked:

"No ladies were invited to accompany you, Uncle George?"

"No—they asked just Ivo an' me—business conference. I fancy none of 'em would quite dare to hold or threaten our women—though you're our weakest point if they got you. They'd have us—cold!"

"H-m-m—just where is this place of Sondermann's—in Surrey?"

"Telephone directory gives it as Redlands Road—a Holmwood number—which I fancy would be somewhere south of Dorking. Ever been there, Comynge?"

"Had the place pointed out to me once, driving through to Sussex. After leaving Holmwood the road goes through a patch of Redlands Wood, then you pass the Sondermann estate with a high wall around it—then another patch of wood, three fine estates of several hundred acres, and so on down to Ockley Court. Nothing but very small villages until you get down to Horsham in Sussex, twelve miles below Dorking. Sondermann's estate appeared to be pretty well isolated—it's on the wooded downs, about eight hundred feet above sea-level."

Jean had gone over to one of the wide map-drawers in the book-shelving which lined the walls and fished out the Bartholomew half-inch-to-mile sheet for Surrey, and a larger section on a two-inch scale which gave all the topography, land-grants and surface-features. In half an hour she had obtained an excellent idea of the neighborhood around the Sondermann estate—and, once fixed in her mind, it was the sort of thing she didn't forget.

As the only daughter of Earl Falknyss, the Honorable Jean had grown up as the nearest neighbor of the Trevor children in South Devon, unconsciously becoming absorbed in everything that interested them. Later she was usually to be found with Lord Ivo tinkering with something in the machine-shops at Trevor Hall—and finally built a small gasoline motor without assistance. And after evidencing upon several occasions that she possessed a cool head and was capable of quick thinking, she was accepted by the family as having the same brand of instinctive competency which cropped out in all of them. Lord Ivo's interest in her was openly acknowledged.

Now after studying the maps she took no further part in the conversation while Lord Comynge and Sir Charles remained. After they left, she called Prince Abdool over to look at the maps with her.

"What do you think about their accepting that invitation, Abdool?"

"If one desired their lives, they could be killed on the London streets—as the friend of my father's son pointed out."

"Yes—but—Asiatics, you know, have a way of being fiendishly original at torture, and that sort of thing! Well

—anyhow—they mean to go, tomorrow night, and see what happens. So I fancy you an' I might explore that part of Surrey a bit in some disreputable flivver tomorrow—shifting to a higher-powered car before they arrive at Sondermann's. What?"

"*Aie*—we do even as thou sayest."

About nine the following evening—in dinner-clothes and topcoats—the Marquess and Salcombe drove in through the lodge-gates of the Sondermann estate and were received with every evidence of pleasure and courtesy by their host, who introduced them to the women of his family and three guests—then showed them over his house, giving them a very creditable rendering of the Tristan "Liebestod" on his magnificent organ, after which the men adjourned to his study for their conference. It drifted along, good-naturedly enough, with Baron Tatashima frankly admitting that his government was cramped for ready funds, and Sondermann's admission that his company was itself so tied up that they were simply unable to assist in any way.

The Marquess presently clarified the discussion by saying:

"You are tacitly suggesting, gentlemen, that some of the banking-houses affiliated with us *could* loan you all that is needed—if they would? Well—I fancy that is true—but you are unable to offer any reasonable security. You are conducting an inexcusable war upon the Asiatic mainland—an' are desperately in need of funds to go on with it. None of the leading bankers anywhere will lend one solitary yen for that purpose—the risk of losing their money is too great. Withdraw your forces from the mainland—give guarantees that you will not again attempt this sort of thing—and I fancy you could get any loan you need for your own development within twenty-four hours."

"You would not be disposed to assist us under any other conditions, Marquess?"

"I couldn't if I would—because this decision was reached by enough of the world-bankers to control the situation, practically. But I'm not disposed to shield myself behind that fact—if the decision rested with me alone, I would still refuse. . . . My word, gentlemen! The decision isn't up to us at all—it's up to you! Get out of China an' stay out! Then you'll have no diffic'lty about your loans."

"Our Emperor, sir, does not consider what we do in China any of the outside world's business!"

"Well—that's where the outside world is not in accord with your Emperor. It is not declaring war against him or your country. It is not slaughtering your people by the hundred thousand with guns and lethal gas. We are merely saying *stop!* . . . Go back a bit! And, my dear Baron, I fancy you'll find that we mean it."

IT had been an evident strain upon Tatashima to keep his temper—avoid saying the vitriolic things running through his mind—but his race are past-masters in betraying nothing by their facial expression. So, for another half-hour, the talk was pleasantly kept upon general topics. Then the Marquess and Salcombe took their leave in their car. As they were approaching the lodge-gates, the Marquess spoke through the tube to his chauffeur:

"Achmet, turn to the right when you go out, and drive south. Switch off your lights. Get right along, but drive carefully. They'll be expecting us to drive north, for the city—an' there's just a possibility that they may have neglected to plug both ends."

The race they were dealing with, however, were not as careless as that. A quarter-mile down the road toward Sussex, they saw a good-sized lorry stalled across the road in the moonlight, and Achmet instinctively slowed up, on the chance that they hadn't been seen as yet.

"Draw up in the deep shadow of these trees at the side of the road—we'll pile out an' cut through the woods. You go back a short distance, and lie down in the shadow this side of the wall, Achmet. They may overlook you—give a chance for you to get away in the car!"

The Marquess and Salcombe hadn't gone three hundred feet through the wood before they were surrounded, and their wrists tied behind them. Achmet was overtaken an hour later, just as he thought he was getting safely away on foot—so that he had no idea whatever where the others had been taken.

WHEN Jean and Prince Abdool of Afridistan had started out, in a rather disreputable car, she silently tried to project herself into the skins of Sondermann's lot and decide what she would do in their places. Presently her reflections became an audible monologue:

"Fancy they really will get Uncle George and Ivo in the show-down because they'll make it just about water-tight before they start anything. Well—I'd say that Sondermann won't consent to having 'em confined in his house or anywhere about his estate—too likely to be discovered, sooner or later, an' it's a criminal offense whether they're let go or actually killed. He'll not have any of his employees mixed up in it, either—too well known to the County police. This leaves 'em in the hands of that Asiatic crowd altogether. They can't risk takin' 'em very far away—too much chance of being spotted—got to be some place within a mile of Sondermann's—what? Some unoccupied house, don't you think? I remember some estate agents in Dorking—they'd know of any vacant property for lease in the neighborhood. What say we stop there first? Eh?"

The agents told them that at the moment there was no unoccupied property within ten miles. Had they inquired during the previous week, they might have obtained a small manor-house on the west road over the downs at the edge of Redlands Wood, a mile beyond Redlands Farm—a place they could have had for very reasonable rent because it was on a secondary road not in the best condition for motoring. But it had been taken now on a three-months' lease by a party of foreigners—Orientals, the agent fancied.

Thanking him, they said they would have to look for something farther south—and drove off down that secondary road, which was very clearly marked on their ordnance map. From the agent's description there was no mistaking the small manor-house when they came to it, partly hidden in the edge of Redlands Wood. And, finding a grass-grown charcoal burners' track leading through the undergrowth into the wood, Jean forced the old flivver along it for half a mile until they came to an eight-foot concrete wall.

"This'll be the Sondermann estate, Abdool—got to be! No other place of this size anywhere near this wood—I looked up the land-titles on the ownership-maps of this neighborhood. No difficulty about gettin' over that wall. I fancy Sondermann would have no special reason for policing his house, beyond some sort of lookout by the gamekeepers—and we want to know who he has at that dinner-party which Uncle George ducked out of. May pick up something else if there's a chance to hear anything. No evidence that this wood-track has been used lately—car ought to be safe enough if we run in here and park it late this afternoon. Then we can sneak through the woods to the back of that little manor-house before we go over the wall—get the general lay of things there, too. Meanwhile let's run down to Horsham, in Sussex, an' loaf there a couple of hours. There'll be a decent little inn, I fancy. I could do with a spot of tiffin; how about you?"

The Marquess and Salcombe hadn't gone three hundred yards before they were surrounded.

When they returned and got into the Sondermann estate, they had some narrow escapes in dodging gamekeepers and other men whose duties seemed less clear, but finally wriggled behind some tall shrubs by one of the dining-room windows where, by placing small microphones, attached to ear-receivers, against the glass—an early invention perfected years before by the Marquess—they distinctly caught every word that was said, and got a glimpse, under the curtain-edge, of the party at the table. When the women went into the drawing-room some of the men accompanied them—leaving only Sondermann, Baron Tatashima and Lucius Grootz at the table when the door was closed and bolted against interruption. Grootz said:

"Ve shouldt talk fast—I mus' pe out undt away from here pefore der Marquess undt t'at bright son of his turrn up! T'ey mus' not know I vass in Londton today. Now, der Paron says he vill holdt t'ose two until t'ey lendt him a few millions—w'ich t'ey will not do, Paron! Vell—what you do next mit t'em? Keep 'em intefinitely?"

"Oh, yaes—you may be sure of that, sair. Eef they prove too obstinate—well—I theenk they weel be eliminated as obstacle to our government."

"Hmph! . . . You'd go as far as t'at, vouldt you? I'm not sure I shouldt crry. While t'ey iss alife you mus' reckon mit t'em—anywhere on t'e glope! But if you kill 'em it'll touch off a bowder magazine in Europe—you vill get t'e worrst of it! How long can you pe sure of holdting t'em—safely? A mont'? . . . Two mont'? Here iss der point: In fife or six weeks, mebbe, I couldt cover our group so der Marquess undt his group couldn't do not'ing fery pad mit us—undt small syndicate might pe gifen credits by our crowd v'ich enable t'em to make you some loans. But if t'ose two men get avay from you—I vouldt not risk it. Keep 'em locked up a mont'—undt we see."

After their capture, the Marquess and Salcombe were taken through the wood until they struck a dirt road farther west—then along this to a small deserted manor-house in one room of which some wooden steps were lowered with a block and tackle into a cellar with concrete walls and ceiling—four incandescent bulbs being screwed into ceiling outlets with bent elbows, so that the lamps lay sidewise against the ceiling and not more than three inches below it. There were two cots, two chairs, a walnut table with books and magazines, a mirror on the wall, a wash basin in one corner, and a tray with an appetizing supper on the table. When the steps were hauled up out of the cellar, a trapdoor four inches thick came down and fitted snugly into the opening. In an opposite corner, a four-inch waterpipe projected down through the concrete ceiling. When the two had been carried down into the cellar and their bonds removed, a grinning Asiatic squatted on the edge of the opening and explained:

"We 'ave endeavor to make you comfortable for thees night, Excellencies, an' hope you sleep well. Tomorrow, after breakfast, we ask you to comply weeth our reques'. Yaes! Eef you say 'no'—we gif you luncheon—more time to theenk. In evening, we ask again. You say 'no' again—we gif you one las' good dinner. T'en—water come in t'e beeg pipe—all night. She soak all t'e bedding—your clo'es—eferyt'ing. She come higher and higher—soon, you mus' swim. You can reach t'ose handhold around t'e trap-opening, so you do not drown unless you become exhaust' and let go. But you mus' be on your back wit' t'e face up, to keep nose out of water—because outlet is only t'ree inches below ceiling. Originally, t'e cellar was cistern—use' for collect rain-water from roof—but now a petrol-motor—pump—tank on tower in wood—artesian well—gif more water. Yaes. In t'e morning, eef you haf not let go, you will be mos' tired—perhaps more willing to comply weeth our reques'. Eef not—well, we shut trap and leaf you to soak some more in t'at very strain' poseetion. Yaes."

When the trap was closed, the two men looked at each

other—and laughed. They knew that the Marchioness and Earl Lammerford would be somehow figuring out the situation and their probable whereabouts if they didn't return in a few hours. But of course it boiled down to a question of their endurance and physical resistance during the next forty-eight hours. The "persuading" scheme was a new one to them which sounded as though it might become simply frightful torture in a few hours. . . .

As far as Jean and Prince Abdool could judge from their cautious investigation, there were not more than six of the Orientals concerned in the affair—with possibly a couple of superiors who might come in to interrogate the prisoners next day—and they had prepared to handle about that many, if the circumstances were favorable.

The manor-house being in an isolated position and the Orientals having carefully avoided showing themselves in the neighborhood during the daytime, it didn't occur to them as possible that their night activities might have come under observation. So after lowering the trapdoor and shutting their prisoners below in the cellar, all six of them sat down to a meal in the dining-room, the cook joining them when the others had been served. None of them caught a glimpse of two frightful, goggle-eyed specters, peering in from the outside darkness. No guard had been set outside the house, because it hadn't seemed in the least necessary. They were presumably respectable tenants who had just taken a short lease of the partly furnished house—doing nothing unlawful, as might be seen on the surface. So the two specters—in gas-masks—had no difficulty in sneaking silently through the entrance-hall and tossing four gas-bombs, in thin containers, upon the floor of the dining-room before any of the Asiatics realized what was happening. Three minutes later all of them were unconscious from a gas which kept them so for three or four hours without any subsequent injurious effect. Just to be on the safe side, Jean and Prince Abdool handcuffed them while searching the house—locked them in an upper room in which they dropped two more bombs—Achmet they found chained to a ring-bolt in the attic.

The block and fall hanging from a rafter in the ceiling of a ground-floor room guided them to the trapdoor underneath and the two prisoners in the cellar—who drew their attention to the water-pipe and what had been in store for them the following night. The Orientals they left handcuffed as they were. There were excellent reasons against letting the abduction get into the newspapers, as was certain to happen if they turned them over to the Surrey police—and they wouldn't get rid of the handcuffs without a lot of pretty original explaining. There was no evidence whatever that the Marquess or his son had been mixed up in the affair or had been rescued by their own people.

BACK in Park Lane by two that morning, Jean and Abdool repeated what they had heard of the conference between Lucius Grootz and Sondermann—particularly a remark made by Sondermann that everything for the cargoes of the eight big boats at their long pier on the Chilean coast had been assembled in a mammoth warehouse through which their railway-tracks ran from one end to the other, up in the mountains where their most valuable mines were grouped—and that as soon as Grootz managed to get them some money through a blind subsidiary syndicate, the loading would start.

The Marquess considered the situation a moment. "All of us have had an eye on Lucius, of course—he was the one untrustworthy element if there was any way he could wriggle out of it. So far, he hasn't succeeded in getting us put away for a month or two—he'll not uncover himself until he does. But that big warehouse cargo waiting in those mountains for instant shipment as soon as the Sondermanns get a few millions is a potential risk which might jeopardize our 'pressure' at any moment. I fancy we'll have to deal with that—do it quickly! Ivo, during the last five years we've made a point of having fast emergency yachts somewhere in the neighborhoods of Trinidad, Vancouver, Sydney, Hongkong an' Singapore. Do you know whether one of 'em is anywhere near Trinidad just now?"

"The *Renomah* is lying at Port of Spain—triple-screw, oil-burner, good for thirty-eight in fair weather."

"Good! She'll do admirably. An' we've at least six big amphibians at Trevor Hall ready to go up at any moment. They'll make Horta in the Azores in ten hours—Para, at the mouth of the Amazon, in sixteen more at the outside. The *Renomah* can make Para from Trinidad inside of two days, an' up the river to Manaos in one more—three days from now. The amphibians can reach her there in the same time, each carrying six or eight big aërial torpedoes—leave 'em aboard her an' come back—all except the two biggest and fastest with torpedo-cradles under 'em. Yacht must be fifty miles above Manaos when the planes reach her—it won't do to have anyone spotting the transfer of those torpedoes. From that point down over the Sondermann plants above Quellimare, an' back to the Amazon, is an eighteen-to-twenty-hour flight for those two big planes—possibly less. If they fly over those warehouses twice—droppin' eight or ten torpedoes altogether—it'll set off every pound of high-explosive in the neighborhood. Do you an' Jean want to come along on that trip, Ivo? You're both top-hole at torpedo-practice. What?"

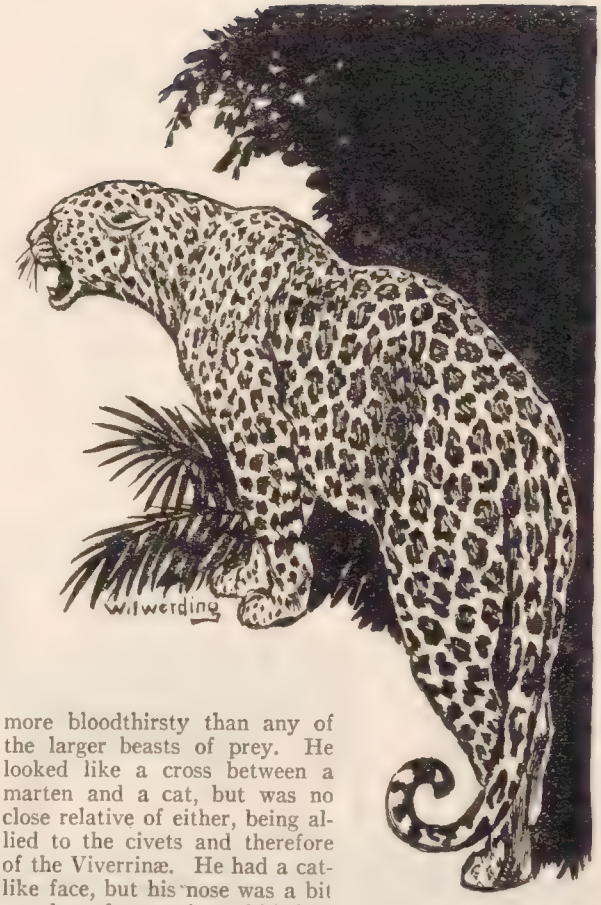
THE explosions at the Sondermann plants in a high Andean valley above the Chilean coast leaked out by degrees. A paper in Iquique ran a small paragraph based upon a report from some of the Indians. Valparaiso sent up a wireless inquiry which seemed to be substantiated. Then the Lima and Buenos Aires sheets sent special correspondents who couldn't seem to get head or tail of the story. They said the destruction was something appalling—sent photographs to prove it. The theory of bombing from the air was ridiculed—no bombing-planes had been seen anywhere up or down the West Coast. None had been heard by anyone at the Sondermann plants. It had been just one terrific concussion after another between two and three in the morning when everyone was asleep. As it happened, none of the Sondermann brothers was in the neighborhood at the time. They estimated the loss as something above forty millions—and were forced into a receivership. The eight Oriental cargo-boats steamed back across the Pacific—in ballast. About that time, the Marquess called Hongkong by radiophone—got in touch with the Tuchan, who is managing director of Garrod's, Limited—and asked him what the situation was, to date.

"Most unexpectedly, my friend, the League found a tactful way of apportioning the military credits for what has been going on here, in such a way that the Islanders can withdraw without losing face. And on the fourteenth, the Eleventh Division sailed for home, with a notice of other withdrawals very soon. What has been going on in Europe we do not know—but the 'pressure' appears to have checked immediate activities. I think, however, you should discount that, somewhat—inasmuch as replacements are being landed in Manchuria and Formosa. We think it amounts to this: If the Islanders find it possible to obtain, anywhere, loans running to a hundred million yen, they would undertake a campaign of conquest—and lose, because four hundred and fifty million Chinese would oppose them to the last man. As it looks to us now—we doubt if they could get a hundred millions or the half of it."

Death Stalks the Veldt

A fascinating story of wilderness life in Africa, by a man who knows it well—illustrated by the author.

By WALTER J. WILWERDING



THE night was as black as the bowels of a cave—one of those Stygian nights that one often finds in the tropics when clouds have shut out the feeble light from the stars. Yet, in spite of the blackness that enveloped everything, things moved about in the negritic density, for there are a multitude of clawed and fanged deaths in these parts whose nefarious deeds must needs be promoted under cover of the darkness. Hyenas moaned on their carrion trail; a jackal yapped at them in high-keyed derision; and off across a lake from the direction of an acacia forest, a leopard coughed twice: *"Uh-hah, uh-hah!"*

Genet paused in the trail he was following; trying to separate the multitude of scents that crossed and criss-crossed each other. In the midst of his sniffing in the dust, he gave a sudden start, executed a move between a back-somersault and a corkscrew dive, and landed fairly underneath some spike-studded thorn branches, just as something struck the spot where he had been a split second before. Great needle-sharp talons left pointed marks in the trail; there was an odd clicking sound; then the thing —whatever it was—dissolved, silent as death, into the darkness whence it had come.

Genet spat a curse at the night's blackness, for there was nothing else left to curse at. A moment later he heard the alarmed sneezing of impallas and then the quick tapping of their sharp hoofs as they fled in long leaps, panic-stricken, into the night. The alarmed hurrying of a herd of small gazelles next smote upon his senses, and he pricked up his ears and wrinkled his nose as he heard the faint bleating of a gazelle kid. The silent killer of the night was abroad again. . . .

Genet waited in his thorny retreat until the sounds of hoofs had dissolved into the distance, to avoid being trampled upon in the trail, and then proceeded into the open trail with considerable caution, every sense on the alert, for he had no stomach for being pounced upon out of nowhere.

Ever since he had been a soft-furred kit, following his mother about the trails, he had made this place his home. Hunting was good in the bush and forest country near this isolated lake, for every manner of beast and bird came here to drink from miles about. It was a paradise for hunters like Genet, for although he was but eighteen inches long, not including his long ringed tail, Genet was a hunter among hunters, and in comparison to size, was more bloodthirsty than any of the larger beasts of prey. He looked like a cross between a marten and a cat, but was no close relative of either, being allied to the civets and therefore of the Viverrinæ. He had a cat-like face, but his nose was a bit too sharp for a cat's, and his legs were much shorter in proportion to the length of his body.

Chiefly he hunted mice, rats, birds and other small veldt inhabitants, and there was no peril attendant upon his hunting, except that he had to be constantly on the alert to keep from being hunted himself; for the land abounded in large, ferocious hunters and any of these clawed and fanged beasts would have no scruples about snuffing out his small life with a single paw-stroke or chop of fangs.

However, his exceeding swiftness—there is perhaps no faster four-legged beast—stood him in good stead, and many a beast of prey had pounced at him from ambush, only to find that they had pounced upon nothing; for Genet contrived to be some other place than the spot on which they landed with outspread claws.

But of late some sinister menace had invaded his favorite hunting-grounds: a menace that he somehow could not apprehend. Three times it had struck in as many months and each time it had taken a mate from him. One mate had been taken almost at his very side, while the two were out night-hunting; another had become separated from him for a few moments, while on a trail, and when he had stopped for her to come up, she had failed to appear. He had gone back to her trail and followed it for a short distance, but it had come to a sudden stop, as if she had dissolved into nothingness.

The land was full of others of his kind and he was an adept at picking up new mates, by means of fair or foul, so he had soon acquired another one, but she also was taken from him one night when they were busily engaged in devouring a pair of sand-grouse. They had pounced

upon the huddled flock; each had caught a bird and Genet was separated a jump or two from her, when he suddenly heard her agonized screech. If he had been a coward he would not have been a genet, and with a bound he had cleared the distance between them, baring his sharp teeth for the combat. But there was to be no battle—neither mate, nor beast of prey, nor anything else confronted him. . . . He was alone with the sand-grouse and the night.

Each time a mate was taken from him, he had heard a sharp clicking sound, as if one struck dice together, but aside from this there was only silence—no hurrying of padded feet, no striking of claws upon stones, no scent on the earth to give him a clue. He was one of the most nervously alert creatures of the bush-veldt. These hair-raising experiences had made his nerves still more jumpy—if that were possible—and as a result he was all set to

execute a double-quick disappearing act at the flick of a whisker.

Genet had no sooner started out on the trail again after the last alarm, when he was obliged to jack-knife to one side to make way for an old male mongoose, who hurried along the trail in long bounding jumps and swore through bared teeth at each jump. Here was something strange, for the mongoose was also anything but a coward—but Genet sniffed the night air as he passed and his keen nose told him that there was blood upon the mongoose's banded coat, blood of his own and not that of one of his victims.

A big-eared fox sneaked by furtively and swiftly, as though the devil were at his heels, and at the lake's edge the impallas, who had now gone to drink, were snorting nervously, *"P-r-r, p-r-r, p-r-r!"* Again the leopard coughed, *"Uh-hah, uh-hah, uh-hah!"*

Life under such conditions might be easy enough to maintain if one could find a safe retreat and could stay there for all of one's days, but one must eat in order to live, and eating, when one is a genet, means hunting. So, pocketing his nervousness, Genet made his way to an acacia grove, where he soon was streaming up the trunk of a tree, for his wonderful nose told him that he would find some plump, quail-like francolin roosting here. The scent led him to the place where a half dozen of them were asleep. Hunching his back like an inch-worm, his eyes glittering, he leaped upon the nearest. In his eagerness to kill he did not make sure of his aim and failed at once to catch it by the throat and stifle its cry. Consequently the others awakened and rocketed away into the night with a great booming of wings, to find other roosts as best they might.

The cry of the dying francolin also gave the deed away to others that roamed about this death-stalked wilderness and soon another beast was crouched upon a near-by branch, ready to dispute Genet's right to his meal. This newcomer was a good double for Genet in size and contour, but Genet's nose told him at once that this was one of his own kind and in a moment he was a-bristle, hissing a "keep-off" warning; for he had no intention of sharing his meal with anyone. Then he sensed something that changed his aggressive attitude; for this other one was a female. His snarls immediately changed to purring notes of invitation and he edged to one side on the branch to give her a chance to share the meat.

For a time she crouched in distrust of his intentions; then, gliding a bit closer, she grasped one foot of the francolin fiercely in her teeth and pulled it toward her with determination. Genet spat at her for this unladylike breach of jungle etiquette and sinking his teeth in the francolin's neck, hung on doggedly while she jerked and pulled. Thus—one on each end of the unfortunate bird—hissing and snarling and pulling, they ate their meal.

The lady, even as some more civilized ladies do, seemed to take for granted the food that he had furnished, and was no more inclined toward friendliness when she was finished than when she had first invited herself to the repast. The last mouthful of warm flesh was no sooner consumed than she turned and whisked down the tree, with Genet following meekly at her heels—as meekly, at any rate, as was possible while dashing, darting, bounding and hurrying after the streak that preceded him through the maze of trails they treaded.

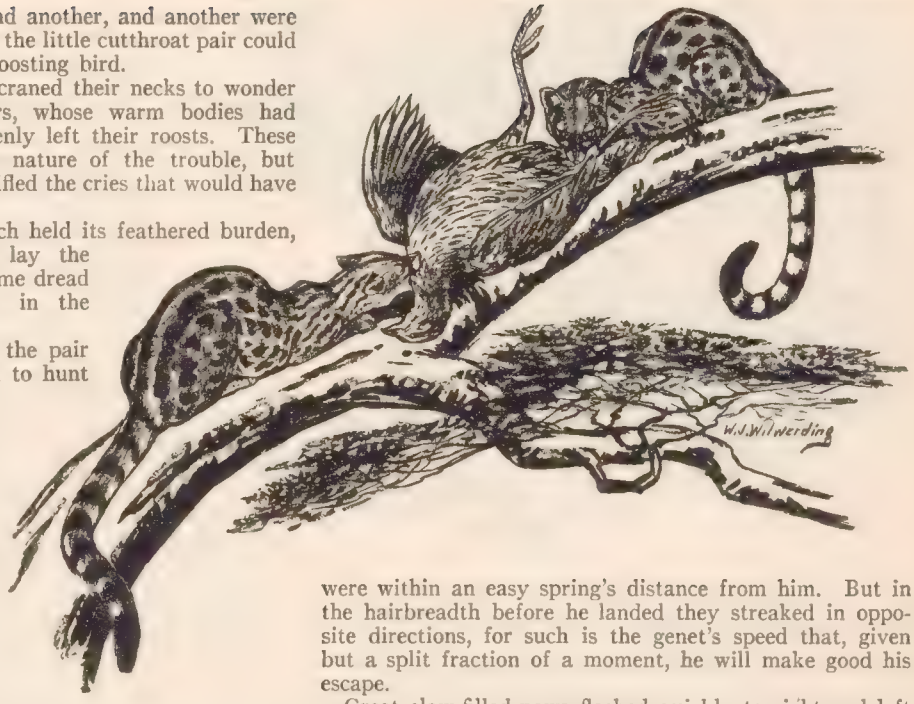
The taste of the warm flesh seemed to have spurred her into a frenzied animation, and steadily she held to the trail until at last she arrived at another grove of acacias that encircled a grassy bit of open veldt. Without hesitation, as if she knew full well where the trail would lead, her lissome form shot up the trunk of a tree, with Genet close at her heels. Twisting and darting with unrivaled celerity, she made her nimble way to the very top branches of the tree and then Genet found out why she had come here. The blackness of the night fairly reeked with the warm scent of roosting birds, for the kanga, or guinea-fowl, used these acacias as a nightly roost and the flat-topped trees were bent with the weight of hundreds of these numidine birds.

Even before Genet had time to whisk his supple form to where they roosted, the female was at her bloody task and a feathered form hurtled past him toward the ground below. Then methodically they worked together—swiftly and silently the gory work was done, nor was one bird allowed to utter a cry and give the crimson-tainted game away. A throat was cut, a plump form fell limply from its perch to catch on thorny branches or strike with a dull

thud far below. Another, and another, and another were served likewise, as quickly as the little cutthroat pair could leap from roosting bird to roosting bird.

Some near by awoke and craned their necks to wonder sleepily why their neighbors, whose warm bodies had crowded against them, suddenly left their roosts. These soon were appraised of the nature of the trouble, but simultaneously sharp teeth stifled the cries that would have spread the alarm.

Ere long each thorny crotch held its feathered burden, while underneath the tree lay the polka-dotted kangas, as if some dread affliction had visited them in the night's dark hours.



Then, gorged with blood, the pair scurried down the tree-trunk to hunt a hollow somewhere and sleep off this debauch. But it seemed that their evil work had barred the way for them: the glade was thick with whispering and snarling and snickering of fangs. The dead birds had attracted ratels, civets, foxes, jackals and hyenas until it appeared as though the grass beneath the tree had become a congress of all night-hunters of Africa.

There was much snatching of dead guinea-fowl and running for cover, but often the snatcher had to fight his way out or had the bird taken from him. In all this confusion the two little genets contrived somehow to run the gantlet, though not until a hyena had come within a fang's stroke of serving Genet as he had served the guinea-fowl —and only Genet's quick action a moment later, in diverting the attention of his large cousin the civet, by biting him in the leg, saved the life of his lady fair, who had run afoul of the civet's teeth.

They were well out of that death-filled glade and were questing about for some snug retreat, when something hurtled out of the darkness and bounded full upon them —or rather where they had been a lightning-flash before. The leopard was on his way to investigate the sounds and smells wafted to him from the glade they had so recently deserted, when he had heard their approach, for, in spite of their light tread, his cat ears told him of their coming.

Catlike he had awaited them, tense and alert, until they were within an easy spring's distance from him. But in the hairbreadth before he landed they streaked in opposite directions, for such is the genet's speed that, given but a split fraction of a moment, he will make good his escape.

Great claw-filled paws flashed quickly to right and left at their retreating tails; then, snarling in crazed fury, the spotted cat made his decision, and whirling quickly, bounded after Genet. A scant meal Genet would make for him, but a leopard is half mad even in his best moments and this one's brain went red with the desire to destroy.

Genet flashed under the trunk of a fallen mimosa, but the leopard seemed on both sides of the tree-trunk at once, batting at Genet first with one paw and then with the other, in the manner in which a cat bats at a mouse. Genet ran toward the upper end, where underneath the tangled mass of branches, he hoped to evade the big cat. But the leopard had spent much of his spotted life in the branches of trees and, though this tangled mass of branches lay on the ground, he moved his supple form from branch to branch with expert ease, and his rapid paw-strokes beat a continuous tattoo in the wake of Genet's tail. Yet Genet had the advantage in unrivaled swiftness; finding an opening at last that led to a tangle of thorn-bushes, and risking all in a quick dash, he was soon under the thorn-studded bower of bushes and free from the leopard's unwelcome company.

Here he crouched for a time and nursed his various grievances; chief among these was his disappointment in having been so quickly separated from his new love. Then he heard the leopard's coughing *"Uh-hah"* from the direction of the acacia grove and he knew the fierce feline was giving trouble to others at the guinea-fowl feast, and that the way, as far as he was concerned, was safe again. He retraced his steps to the place where he and his mate had first encountered the leopard, and putting his nose to her trail, followed where it led.

It took him through one maze of thorn-bowered galleries after another and then for a space he followed it in the open. He was tripping along in the rapid, undulating manner of his kind when he suddenly realized that he had overrun her trail. He

retraced his steps and followed it once more, but again he overran it in his eagerness to catch up with her. Once more he went back and picked up her trail and this time he patiently set his nose to it and followed along. . . . Then the reason for his overrunning it raced excitedly through his fiery little brain: the trail ended suddenly; it did not carry on—something was very wrong! Panic-stricken, he raced back and forth, trying vainly to pick the trail up again. He hunched his mottled back and his nose wove nervously back and forth, sniffing.

Perhaps some other beast had come this way and blotted out her trail; perhaps she had jumped farther than usual in avoiding some peril; perhaps he would pick the trail up again farther on. . . . But the trail had ended forever. He went on with his mind in a red daze until something loomed before him—something redolent with familiar smells. He had come upon a native compound.

Genet cautiously circled the hut that formed one end of the compound. Hunting was usually good in such places, for they are infested with many varieties of African rats and mice, and in addition the natives keep domestic fowls, which attract the noses of animals like Genet. He was not hungry, for he had fed fully this night; but, weasel-like, the genet finds sufficient incentive to hunt in the sheer joy of killing. Whether he thought he might find his mate here or whether the smells he encountered had already made him forget her, is difficult to say, but he searched diligently for an opening.

The Wairamba were well aware that the night swarmed with every variety of blood-craving form of death, and had therefore blocked all entrances quite effectively—but they had overlooked one place, where the ever-present East African house mice had tunneled under the mud sides of the hut. These house mice make very ambitious tunnels, for they are the size of young rats and are prodigious diggers.

Genet sniffed about, and finding the tunnel, insinuated his nose; and where his nose went the rest of him was sure to follow—for crawling on his belly like a snake was one of his special accomplishments. The Wairamba had put their chickens in the hut for the night,—to be sure they would still have them in the morning,—and their scent, reaching somehow above that of the sleeping natives, attracted Genet's nose at once.

He had no sooner entered the hut, however, when he ran smack into one of the very mice which had so accommodatingly dug the tunnel for his use. The night is also their time for making merry, and these mice were therefore racing about the hut, quite oblivious of the sleeping natives, who are accustomed to all sorts of pests and sleep soundly while surrounded and covered with them.

The mice never knew Genet was there until he had one by the neck. He stifled its alarmed squeak with his needle-sharp teeth; but the squeak was enough to send the rest scuttling to the safety of their nests in the roof, so Genet turned his attentions to the fowl.

He was having a fine time, according to his own ideas of sport, when one hen cackled wildly and spoiled the game. An excited chase around the hut followed, with the natives wielding clubs, spear and knives,—hitting each other across the shins and getting generally in each other's way,—while Genet streaked over the whole place with unparalleled suppleness and speed, dodging and gliding this way and that; one moment he was up on the pole rafters of the hut, the next on the floor, and again, racing up the rough mud walls.

His exceeding swiftness melted his spots together into dark streaks and the natives wasted good energy in swatting places he had just left. This lasted for some minutes until—fortunately or perhaps by design—he again found the mouse-hole and dissolved into the darkness whence he came. He had come in empty-jawed and went out the same way, but he had left one dead mouse, five dead hens and several excited natives as testimony that he had paid a visit.

Now this would have been quite all right as far as he was concerned, for he enjoyed a good chase,—that was part of the game of his wild existence,—but he snooped about near the outskirts of the compound and there, in a little open spot between thorn-bushes, that hedged it on three sides, he smelled the head of one of the very chickens he had been hunting in the hut. He felt he must needs sniff further into this business, when—*snap*—something fastened on his foot.

He jerked back on the instant that he felt something give beneath his foot, but in spite of his lightning speed, it caught his toes. He bit at the thing furiously and found it hard, cold and unyielding to his teeth. And, blackest of black curses, he could in no way pull his toes loose. It came along with him when he pulled, and something was fastened to it that rattled loudly in a metallic manner—a sound that seemed like the beating of native tom-toms in the night, advertising his plight unmistakably.

He hissed and snarled, biting the trap again and again in the desperation of his extremity, until his nose was raw and his lips bleeding.

There could hardly be a worse place or time to be caught in a trap than in Africa at night. Usually the one who sets the trap finds it sprung, but empty, in the morning—not because the miserable victim gets away, but because others have made a meal of him.

A pattering of feet advertised the fact that one of these was already on his way to end Genet's worries. Genet hunched his slender body in preparation for the killer's approach. His keen nostrils told him that the one who came near was none other than the black-backed jackal, and he knew he could expect no quarter from this sharp-eared, sharp-nosed and sharp-fanged wild dog. He bared his teeth and prepared to sink them into his enemy's nose, as the jackal stopped a few feet away and tried, 'twixt odor of fowl's head, scent of steel and musky smell of

Genet, to figure this thing out before approaching too closely.

For a few moments he turned this conglomeration of smells over in his foxlike head; then, deciding that it was safe to go on with the business, he lunged forward with a snap of fangs, intending to bury them in Genet's neck. But at that same moment, something else had seen Genet in the trap and on the instant had pounced. The jackal jumped back with shrill yelps of alarm, for it seemed this attacker was sticking needles into his skull. His head had been in the way when it had lunged at Genet. One quick bite Genet gave him, even as this other menace descended out of the night, then doubling quickly back, he managed somehow to drag himself and the trap under the protection of thorn-bushes, leaving the field and the quarrel to those other two who had come to hunt him at the same time. But the jackal had had enough; already he was putting distance behind him. Again Genet heard that faint clicking.

But he had other worries beside this menace that came from nowhere and made clicking sounds. He was racking his brain for some means of ridding himself of this clanking evil on his foot, that had placed him in this helpless predicament, when a skulking crowd of cutthroats appeared upon the scene—a nasty, gibbering gang of hyenas, who came to pay him a visit and see what they could do for him. They were so bent on doing things right away and so sure the job could be quickly and easily done, that already they were snickering and laughing in ghoulish humor, in anticipation of the task.

"Yeh-heh-heh-heh-heh!" one laughed and lunged forward with a great *chop* of fangs—one of those chops that would take a man's hand off neatly at the wrist with one stroke. But Genet had no desire to be cut in twain just yet; he maneuvered somehow to drag the trap farther underneath the overhanging branches of thorn. So in place of genet meat the hyena got thorns in his blunt, black muzzle—and he swore throatily at the pain.

Then the hyena set to scratching with one heavy forefoot to drag Genet forth from the thorny protection, while the rest stood back and laughed and gibbered and moaned and made all the other unearthly racket of which they are capable. Genet would not have been much more than a mouthful for any one of these repulsive scavengers, but no doubt each one thought he would be the first to grab when the more ambitious one dragged the little animal forth.

For a time things looked black for the little fire-brain, for if that paw happened to catch on the trap's chain—

But then the thing happened that the hyena would have given his bat-ears to avoid—if he had enough sense to know what he was about, which we may seriously doubt. He placed his heavy forefoot on the very spring of the trap, and thinking he had Genet at last, pressed down hard to drag him forth. Genet, straining backward to keep out of reach, suddenly found himself free. The next moment he had vanished along one of the thorn-covered trails which the smaller veldt inhabitants use as a protection from larger four-footed evils.

When, after much stupid scratching and scraping, the hyenas by chance finally got the trap out, they found only a few of Genet's hairs sticking to the jaws, and the bait of the chicken's head on the pan.

The trap had done Genet's foot no good, even though he was but caught by the toes of one forefoot, and he progressed through the wild on three feet, favoring the other and swearing sibilantly between set teeth whenever he bumped it against some obstruction.

He had but one thought in mind now—to get to some safe retreat in which to rest and nurse his sore foot. Coming to a huge twisted mimosa to which his unerring sense of direction had taken him, he was soon scampering up the rough trunk to a snug place in the hollow of a thick limb. He was about to enter the hollow when some sixth sense warned him to draw back. In the next atom of time he doubled back, quick as the quiver of an electric spark, and sprang to another limb, as a long, slender tree mamba struck at him.

He crouched motionless for a moment, watching intently for the deadly serpent's next move, when something else, that had caught the snake's movement, dropped silently through the branches and fastened upon it. Too late this hunter of the night saw his great mistake; too late to stop his plummetlike plunge! He had seen the little genet come up the tree and had thought to catch him. The movement of the snake had fooled him and he had caught seven feet of fanged deadliness instead!

There was a sickening contortion of the scaled length as needle-sharp talons sought quickly to cut the life out of it, but the head of that sinuous form flashed in rapidly, once, twice, thrice. . . . Talons pierced the mamba's supple length to the vitals, even as it struck, but the fangs had gone home in sinewy thighs; for a few moments Genet heard a snapping and clicking, then serpent and hunter turned over and over, in one tangled mass, to fall in a lifeless heap on the hard dried earth below.

Genet had flattened himself to the limb during those few tense moments—and as he now peered down into the darkness whither these two had lately vanished, he knew somehow that the silent menace of the night had robbed him of his last mate. He wrinkled his nose in a snarl and proceeded to his home in the hollow, where dawn, peeping in through the leaves, found him curled up in sleep. . . .

"It is a large owl, Bwana, a very large one," exclaimed Watindo, my gun-bearer, when I asked him to see what manner of huge bird was lying dead under the mimosa tree we were passing in the early dawn. "Oh, *l-e-e-e!*" he exclaimed further. "Bundi tried to catch a mamba—and it is bad to try to catch a mamba, Bwana, for the mamba is *baya sana* (very bad); but Bundi is *kali sana* (very fierce), and he killed the mamba before he himself died of the mamba's poison."

I stepped close to inspect the great bird and saw that it was the "milky eagle" owl, a rare bird even in its native habitat. Its eyes were dark instead of yellow, like its cousin, the great horned owl of America, and even in death it had a fearsome and defiant look.

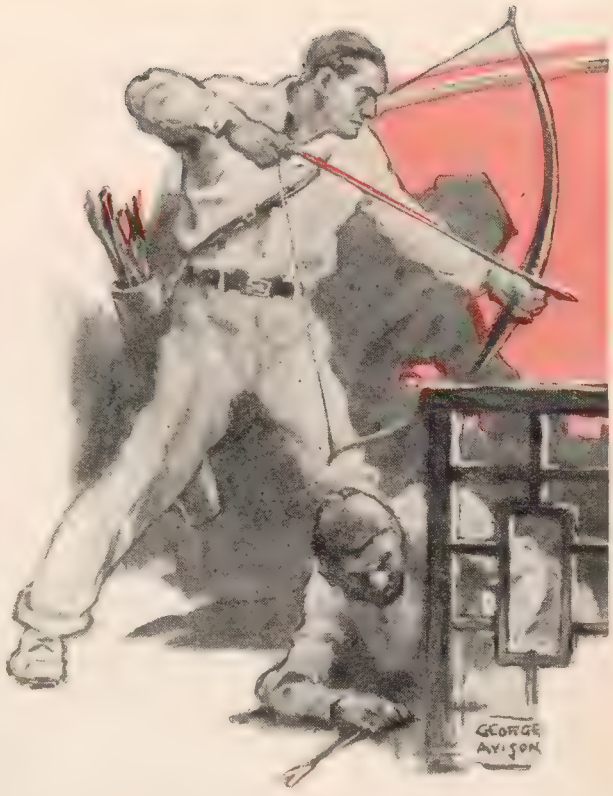
When we passed that way again, on our return from the hunt, the mongoose had been there. The mamba had disappeared, and where the great eagle owl had lain, a scattered mass of gray feathers was blowing about over the veldt, even as this tiger among birds had floated about on his nightly raids—silently, save for the angry snapping of his beak.

One Night In Canton

A strange and stirring tale of wild adventure in China, by the noted author of "The Cruise of the Sea Hawk," "Strange Treasure" and many others.

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES



IF by any chance you are collecting amazing experiences, you should have been in Canton last year, when Earl Stanley hit southern China.

He walked into my Shameen office one day and introduced himself—a bundle of nerves and muscle with a booming raucous voice, a grin that would disarm the Sphinx, and an emanation of physical and mental vigor like a keen north wind. His self-assurance was a real force.

"Brendon, I hear you're one of the best-posted men in China on antiques and other valuables, barring nothing," he said when the introduction had been accomplished.

"That's my business," I answered cautiously. "I know a little about it, not too much."

He shoved back his hat and seated himself on one corner of my desk. You know the type.

"Listen, now. I got here yesterday. Last night I ran onto something pretty big, if true. It looks good to me. I'm a lawyer in San Francisco, and can size 'em up. My Chinese friends recommend you, so I'm here. Ever hear of the jade necklace owned by the old Dowager Empress?"

I leaned back and smiled. "Who hasn't? They say it was ten years in the making. A graduated string of the finest, purest jade in existence, each bead delicately carved in fantastic designs—surface carving only. When she died, it vanished. Every dealer and collector in China has been looking for it these twenty years! It's never turned up."

"I've found it," Stanley announced calmly. "However, it'll take some getting, and as I don't know much about jade, I'm going to let you in on the game."

"Thanks," I said dryly, trying to figure him out. "Just where is it?"

"A girl's got it, on a flower-boat up our street. Over in Saikwan, the west suburb."

"I've heard of it," I said, trying not to gasp. He spoke as casually as though the necklace were in some shop-window. Stanley read my expression, and broke out laughing.

"Not what you think, Brendon. Not that kind of flower-boat! I can answer for this girl. She's a princess, too. A real one. The loveliest creature you ever saw!"

I took him out for a drink at the Victoria bar, to see if he was real. He was. My first notion, of course, was that here we had a poor *fang gwai lo* being victimized; but this foreign devil was nobody's victim. Quite the contrary!

To my amazement, I found he had moved into the abandoned Ng house in Saikwan. The ancient and wealthy Ng family had fled to Hongkong a couple of years previously, to live in safety under British rule. Stanley had a real pull in Canton, too, being attorney for many Chinese in San Francisco, knowing them intimately. So the Ng family had given him their disused Saikwan house, with servants to boot. What was more, Stanley spoke Cantonese fluently. He could handle the nine tones like a native.

Come to find out, he had anticipated this trip for years, had learned Cantonese, and meant to spend six months here. His family, now at Hongkong, would follow in a fortnight. He was unmarried. His family were staid Boston folk, two sisters and an aunt; not from San Francisco.

"Let's discourse about the Princess and her jewels," I suggested. "How did you meet her?"

"Her boat's moored out under my windows," he said casually. "We've had several confabs since I moved in yesterday. I'm invited to dinner tonight. You come along. Believe me, she's a bird! The back of the house is over the canal, you know. She wears the necklace all the time."

I felt rather helpless. This poor fish was walking on eggs loaded with dynamite and apparently did not know it. The notion that he, hardly a day in Canton, could have found what hundreds of people had been vainly seeking so many years, was ludicrous. So was his chatter about a princess.

You know, of course, that outside the closely guarded foreign island of Shameen, anything can happen in Canton, and does—absolutely anything. Government is as you like it. Extortion, kidnaping, murder, pillage, are everyday occurrences. Since the republicans pitched overboard

Illustrated by George Avison

Stanley stood there, cool as you please, loosing shaft after shaft into the throng.

all the old customs, even to stabling mules in the Chen temple, the most beautiful building in all China, the yellow folk have been in absolute chaos.

"This girl is a Manchu princess, of course?" I asked with heavy sarcasm.

"Didn't I tell you?" he jerked out, surprised. "She's Russian, and her name's Marie. Her dad was wiped out by the Reds, getting out of Russia. Her mother married Wu Fang T'sai, the upcountry war-lord. She's aboard the lugger, too. A big fat dame, apparently doped up. Opium."

"Who told you all this?" I asked. "Wu Fang isn't here. His particular bandit realm lies three hundred miles up in the hills."

"Sure," said Stanley brightly. "He's there yet, but soon arriving. Sent his Russian wife and Marie down by this boat to wait here for him."

I almost believed this. It sounded logical. All the coast cities are filled with former marshals and generals who have made their pile and skipped out with their loot and women. When I suggested, however, that Stanley needed a bodyguard rather than a jade expert, he laughed.

"I don't blame you a bit, Brendon. Of course it looks fishy, and that's exactly why I want you along. The natives say you're honest. Your opinion on that necklace would cinch it. And you would be a good bodyguard in case of a row, too. I usually get into rows, somehow. Let's repeat that swizzle once or twice. It's a good drink."

We repeated. Now, despite my native caution, I found myself liking Stanley. He had a way with him, and my tolerant skepticism quickly atrophied. There was no false bluster, no self-delusion, about this chap. The impression of inward vigor grew upon acquaintance. In half an hour we were firm friends. He voiced a boundless enthusiasm about Canton, too.

"Don't you love the old parts of the city not ruined by the horse-roads, as they call the new streets? Man, I could loaf around here for a year! Shell windows and canopies, wide open wooden bars for doors, fan-tan joints—every other house. All of it gives me a great kick! Not to mention the advertisements and billboards. Glad I can read Chinese."

"Glad you're alive, eh?" I said. That was exactly it. The joy of life. This chap Stanley was abrim with energy.

"I forgot to mention," he said suddenly, after we agreed to meet for the evening, "that we may not be entirely welcome on that boat. It has two machine-guns and a dozen of Wu Fang's soldiers as guards. Marie says they look after her mother, mostly, so they may not trouble us. We'll chance it, eh?"

"Sure," I assented. "That and more, if the jades of the empress are there!"

"Well, come early," he said. "I want to show you my bows. I'm a bug on archery, you know. Got in some hunting up north around the imperial tombs. I'll have to tell you about it sometime. Made those chaps up there open their eyes, believe me! Come early."

"Right. By the way, if you got servants with the Ng house, they should be honest boys. What do they say about this boat business?"

"Bad medicine." His alert eyes twinkled. "They're scared of Wu Fang's soldier guards."

"They're right. These Chinese don't fist-fight, but they're like our gangsters back home. When they go out to kill, they kill! Get a bunch of these birds after you, and they stop at nothing."

"Same way with me, feller," and he chuckled. "Think you can find the place all right? It's not easy getting about the native city, you know."

"I've lived here seven years," I told him solemnly. . . .

On sober second thought, I knew Roger Brendon was an unmitigated ass to be let in for such a job, but it was too late to back out.

THIS yarn about the Russian girl and her mother was absolutely true to life. Plenty of high-up Russian women had no other recourse but to enter the harems of Chinese bandit chiefs, so they did it. They are still doing it, what's left of them. Whoever worked the racket on Stanley had made up a good story.

At the time, Canton was in complete disorder. The counter-revolutionists had taken things over, sporadic fighting was still going on, and if foreigners ventured abroad by night they went armed. So before leaving, I slipped my automatic into my pocket, merely from force of habit. I had not used it once all my seven years in

China, except to keep in practice; but one never knew, and poor old Canton had fallen on evil days.

I got to the Ng house a little before dark, and was promptly admitted. Plenty of foreigners lived in the Saikwan district, but none close by here. The house shot straight up from the canal in back, having double entrances. By the attitude of the boy who admitted me, I could see that the staff was badly frightened, but Stanley showed up with a whoop of delight.

"Come along upstairs!" he exclaimed. "We've half an hour to kill, and the drinks are mixed. Real ice, too! Also, my archery outfit's up there. We haven't fixed up the lower rooms yet."

The ice part sounded good. It was hot as purgatory in Canton last summer, as you may recall; a dead, sweltering heat. In another few days I expected to be off for the summer, in common with all others who could afford to clear out.

When the Ng family skipped, they had left the house as it was. Furnished magnificently, rid of all mustiness, lighted with plenty of lamps, the upper rooms were a joy. Windows and doors were all wide open for air, barred with solid teak shutters and poles.

We had the promised drink, and another to make it settle well, and Stanley showed me his archery outfit. It was probably a fine one, but I knew little of such things. He showed me the trick of drawing a yard-long shaft to the head—you pull the string, not the arrow—and laid out his hunting shafts. They were deadly things, with their steel tips.

Then he pulled me into the adjoining room, the back one, crossing to the window and pointing down. I joined him and took a look.

Up and down the canal, below us, were moored a number of such boats as crowd every water-way in Canton. When I say crowd, I mean just that. Here was breathing space, for this canal was a small one. There was no mistaking the boat in question, directly under us.

It was the type of craft known as *tsun-shun*, but smaller than these police and convoy boats, being well under fifty feet in length. Tarpaulins showed the machine-guns at bow and stern, but the gathering darkness hid any details. One end of the craft was swung in plumb against our house-wall. Stanley nudged me.

"She said she'd make it simple for us to get aboard. Good work."

"Does she talk English?" I asked him.

"Nope. French. I couldn't savvy her Chinese at all. It's Mandarin, you know. I had a devil of a time up in Pekin, trying to get understood."

"Has it occurred to you," and I turned from the window, "that this might be along the lines of the old badger game as played in the effete Occident?"

"Sure," he said easily. "But wait till you meet Marie! She's an angel."

With the bitter life of Russian refugees in China behind her, and her mother married to a notorious bandit chief, I had doubts of her angelic quality. However, I dismissed the argument and we had another drink. Then Stanley recollected something he had failed to tell me.

"Look here, Brendon. Forgot to say that she wants to get away from this boat. That mother of hers—well, the old dame is just no good. You know how some of these high-bred people go to pieces under adversity? Exactly like fruit in too hot weather. The fibers are broken down, a spot develops, and your fruit's spoiled. The old lady is like that. She plans to sell off Marie to another war-lord."

"How the devil do you know so much?" I asked. "Been aboard the boat?"

"I only got here yesterday, I told you! No, not aboard, but at the window. We talked French, which the guards didn't savvy. And we've seen each other. You may think I've been tricked, but it's like this, Brendon: I'm gambling on the necklace. If it's the real thing, so is Marie."

A hammering drum of rifle-fire from somewhere not far away, broke in upon us for an instant.

"Hear that?" I said. "Some house being raided, or a mob at work. That's Canton for you these days! The Merchants' Protective Police has fallen to bits."

"Yeah, they need a real police force here," said Stanley. "Tomorrow you take me around to headquarters and I'll give them some pointers. Might organize a real force for them."

"Never mind that. Are you going to take this Russian girl off the boat?"

"Sure, if you say the necklace is the real quill. If not—well, maybe anyhow! To tell you the truth, I've fallen for her hard, feller."

"So I imagined," I said. "Ready to go aboard? Let's get it over."

"Right. Come along. Those guards have been hitting the pipe, I imagine. You can smell opium."

I might have told him that one should not despite Chinese soldiers merely because they smoke opium, but there was little use telling him anything. He was cocky. The queer part was that I actually liked him for it. You could see that he was ready to back up his words.

We went downstairs and opened a window in a dark room, smack above the after deck of the boat. It was not much of a jump. He made it, and I followed. Surprised exclamations broke out, feet pattered on the deck, a sharp order rang out. I was reaching for my gun when a woman's voice lifted cool and clear. She appeared there, ten feet from us, holding a lantern that lit her face and figure. All was quiet instantly. Thus far, at least, they obeyed her. She told them we were her guests, and invited us into the long deck-house.

I was dimly aware of an introduction, of gorgeous things around us as we sat on silk pillows, but only dimly. The hangings and lanterns and precious objects all about became as nothing. I just sat there and gaped. The girl had eyes only for Earl Stanley, and *vice versa*.

She was something to look at. She wore white brocaded silk garments. Her hair was a red-gold mass about her face. I did not even see the necklace at first, because of that face. It was tender and lovely, self-reliant, full of firm and shining character. Her only ornament was the necklace, and one glance at it was enough.

The jade beads were of the purest, deepest color, like emeralds. Each bead was faintly carven, and polished by long fingering, which produces the most beautiful polish known. Never in my life had I seen such jade except in the collection of the old Empress Dowager, most of which went to Europe. And without any exception whatever, I had never seen such a girl as this.

A little old native woman served course after course, Chinese style, but I was the only one to pay attention to dinner. Those two were wrapped up in each other. I don't know much about love at first sight, but it had hit them hard. I tell you, those two people actually flamed,

in the outfling of personality to personality, self to self! Having little French myself, I could not follow their words, but there was no need. Their faces spoke volumes.

All of a sudden Marie reached up, took the looped necklace from about her throat, and with a smile like bursting sunlight thrust it at me. Then she rose and hurried out, laughing, her eyes shining stars of violet.

"She's seeing about our getaway," said Stanley. "Well, what about the jades?"

I fingered the beads for a moment. "Fifty thousand gold, tomorrow," I said. "Double that if you take your time selling it. Where'd she get it, anyhow?"

"Wu Fang looted it somewhere, gave it to her, thinking it was glass." Stanley grinned. "He's an ignorant coolie, used to be a butcher's boy."

"Where's her mother now?"

"On her tenth pipe, or thereabouts."

The girl came back, breathless. At her first words Stanley straightened up. I handed her the necklace, but she refused it, told me to take care of it, as though it meant nothing. I thrust the heavy loops into my jacket pocket. She went on talking rapidly.

"Time to jump," said Stanley. "Those guards are wising up the old dame, and that means hurry."

"You'd better have a look at her," I said dryly. He met my eyes, read my thought, and for a moment I thought he would strike me. Then his lips twisted in a grimace.

"They're not cut off the same pattern inside, Brendon. And it's the inside that makes the externals what they are. Ready?"

I was only too ready to get out of there, as you may imagine.

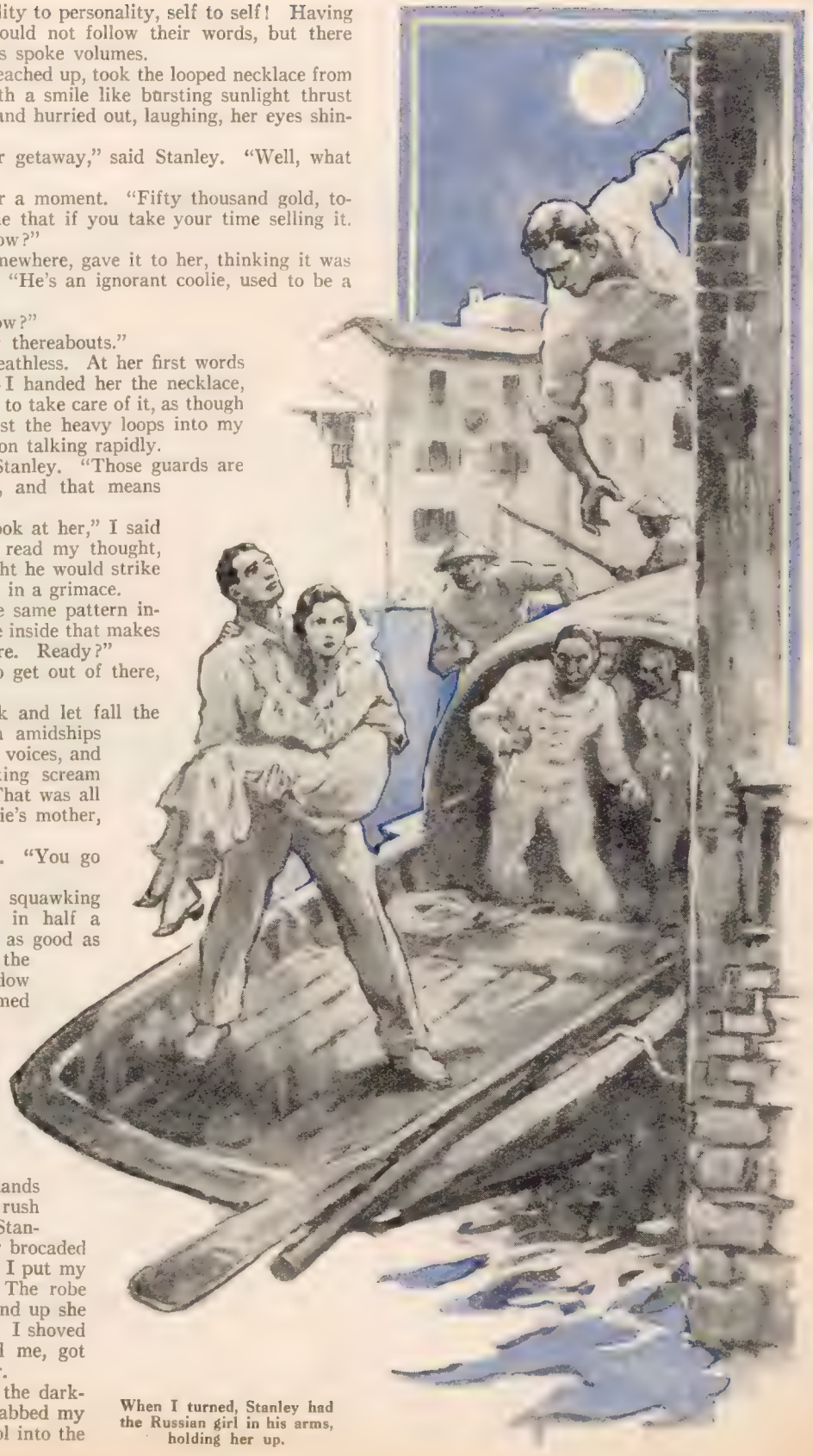
We slipped out on deck and let fall the curtain behind us. From amidships came a great jabbering of voices, and then out burst a squawking scream that curdled my blood. That was all I wanted to know of Marie's mother, princess or not.

"Beat it," said Stanley. "You go first. Pull her up."

We headed aft. That squawking voice shrilled out curses in half a dozen languages, and was as good as a spur to me. Hopping to the rail, I made the open window with a jump, and swarmed over the ledge. When I turned, Stanley had the Russian girl in his arms, holding her up.

Voices burst forth on all sides — shouts of alarm, quick orders, oaths, and feet pounded the deck. I got the girl's hands and drew her up, just as a rush of dark figures broke over Stanley. Fingers jerked at her brocaded robe, pulled her back, and I put my strength into the heave. The robe was ripped clear off her, and up she came to the window ledge. I shoved her into the room behind me, got out my pistol, leaned over.

Stanley came up out of the darkness like a rubber ball, grabbed my arm, and knocked the pistol into the



When I turned, Stanley had the Russian girl in his arms, holding her up.

water. He burst into a laugh, and swung the shutters together. From below came a ripping explosion of shots. Flying splinters filled the air as bullets smashed through the old shutters.

Then a low cry escaped the girl.

We shouted for the servants, but they had all cleared out. I struck a match, saw Stanley holding Marie, and there was blood on her face.

"Upstairs!" he called, and swung her over his shoulder. "Come on! I'll show these devils what's what!"

Then he was off, with a roar of sheer fury. I yelled at him to get out of the house, Shameen being our only refuge, but he never heard me.

When I got upstairs, he was putting out the lights. Marie lay on a couch.

"She's not hurt," he said. "Splinter hit her. I'll show 'em, blast their yellow hides!"

"Use your head!" I broke in. "My gun's gone, you have none. Those birds will be bursting in after a moment. Get out while we can, you fool!"

He ignored me completely. With a jerk, he had strung his long bow and jumped for the open window. Down below broke out a crashing and splintering; Wu Fang's men were breaking in. Then the bowstring twanged. A wild scream rang up from the water below. . . .

Undoubtedly I should make a thrilling yarn of how Stanley stood at the window like a medieval bowman and poured whistling shafts into the yellow devils below, transfixing man after man with his clothyard arrows.

He did all that, sure enough, but I was too frightened to pay much attention. I think he had the time of his life with those playthings. Bullets were smacking all around, and no doubt a mob was already gathering to loot the place. Canton is two-thirds Bolshevik, out to destroy at a moment's notice.

"Damn! Bowstring snapped!" I heard him exclaim. "Well, Brendon, let's go—"

"Too late," I said. "They've broken in. Hear the smashing down below?"

"Slip me that light bow in the corner," he ordered, and I did it. He snapped the string into place, caught up his quiver of arrows, and was gone.

Marie came to her feet, calling out something. I wrapped a dark silk brocade about her white figure and shoved her out toward the stair-head. Stanley stood there, cool as you please, loosing shaft after shaft into the ascending throng. And how he did shoot! Bodies blocked the stairs, yells and shrieks pealed through the house, and the yammering voices of the mob made pandemonium. Wu Fang's men had been joined by a thousand others.

"We're done," said Stanley calmly. "Back, you folks!"

They started a rush from below, scrambling over the bodies, and we drew back into the first room. I slammed and barred the doors. Stanley caught at the embroidered hangings. "All right, Brendon!" he cried. "Split 'em up for a rope, feller!"

I caught the idea and joined him. In two minutes we were knotting together lengths of those glorious silken fabrics, while the doors shook to hammering and pounding. We hurried into the adjoining room that opened into the canal, barred those doors likewise, and Stanley made fast one end of our improvised rope to a teak couch.

I shoved her into the room behind me, got out my pistol and leaned over the window ledge.

"Boat's moved away," he said. "Swim for it! Send her after me."

Then he was gone. Knowing as I did what a Cantonese canal contained, I was not in love with the idea. Besides, I couldn't swim—but they were nearly bursting in upon us, and the smell of smoke was in the air. Some fool had fired the house.

We could see nothing outside, for the smoke hung over the water. That squawking yell still came from the boat; I think her mother was screaming in a passion of rage. Next moment I shoved Marie out, and she went down the line hand over hand like a good one. It was easy to get a grip on the folds of silk, naturally.

At that instant, they came smashing into the darkened room. And now it was fight.

I struck them in the obscurity before they knew what was what. Your John Chinaman has a frenzied horror of fist-fighting. As they broke back in panic, with smoky torches in the background, I doubled back to the window and started down the line. I was halfway to the water when some one hacked through the folds of silk above. I went sprawling, slap into that abominable canal, filled with the garbage and sewage of half the district.

"You big boob, why didn't you tell me you couldn't swim?" I heard Stanley say as he held my nose out of the filthy water.

To rightly comprehend what followed, what could have followed only in Canton waterways, you must get the situation. The canal was exactly like one in Venice, without the boat landings. The houses came straight out of the water, with occasional doors or stone steps. As it was low water, these were well out of reach.

About us and over us was rolling a billowy cloud of smoke from the Ng house, now merrily blazing and crack-

ling, with a spurt of lurid flames dimly visible. Stanley supported me, and Marie paddled beside us. We could scarce hear one another shout. On one side rose the uproar of flames and the voices of the mob fighting over their loot. On the other, the house-walls flung back a perfect storm of yells, shrieks and cries as the neighbors voiced their terror. Boats came surging frenziedly along to get out of the danger zone. Bedlam was let loose all around us.

Then I heard the girl scream twice. Hands gripped at me; a light flashed and was gone. We were being hauled aboard some kind of craft.

"Foreign devils! Foreign devils!" arose astonished voices.

Half drowned, I lay coughing up typhoid germs. Then I felt myself being passed to the deck of a larger boat, and was flung down beside Stanley. Both of us were bound hand and foot. Marie was likewise bound, near us.

All about came the panting cries and stamping feet of struggling men. In the belching smoke it was like a madhouse scene. I became aware of that raucous, squawking yell close at hand, then it was cut short abruptly.

"They have killed her!" cried out Marie in French.

WHO had? Where were we? I had not the least notion. Utter confusion had gripped me. Presently the struggling ceased, and a new voice, clear-cut and distinct, gave sharp orders. Panting men cried out in unison as they worked, and the squeak of oars arose. The smoke began to thin.

"Hey, Brendon! We're back on her boat!" exclaimed Stanley. "Are you tied up?"

"Fully," I said. "Who rescued us?"

"Ask me something easy." He flopped about, and I heard him talking French with Marie. After a minute he addressed me again. "True as gospel. Her boat. She thinks a crowd of river-pirates have grabbed it."

All this time we had been moving through the water, at a good pace. The lights aboard were all extinguished. As the smoke and noise thinned out and disappeared, the clear starlight showed that sweeps were out, men working hard at them and we were in a wider canal.

Two men appeared and stood over us. Stanley rose lurchingly—and they struck out. I heard the blow thud home. Stanley came down on his face and lay there, unconscious. Marie uttered a low moan.

"He's not dead," said one of the men in Cantonese.

They went away, leaving the three of us alone.

After a bit the rowers relaxed their efforts and drew in the sweeps. We were out in a wide channel, probably in the river itself, for they began searching the bodies strewn about the deck, then chucked them over the rail without ceremony. Two of them hauled a fat, shapeless mass from the cabin and Cantonese jokes were passed about. This, I gathered, was Marie's mother. She was dead, and they stripped off her jeweled ornaments before sending her after the others.

Now one of them approached me, and an electric flashlight jumped out at me and Marie.

"Hello, baby!" he exclaimed in English. "Say, what a skirt! Who are you, big boy?"

I uttered a gasp of amazement. "Are you American?"

"Sure thing," came the laughing response. "Sam Yung, Grant Street. Now I'm back home, showing 'em how the racket should be worked. You know Grant Street?"

A Chinatown graduate! It was nothing unusual. Here in Canton, and down at Sze Yap, where most of the alleged Cantonese in America hail from, I had frequently encountered yellow men "back home" from America.

"Well met, Sam!" I exclaimed joyfully. "For the love of Mike, turn us loose, will you?"

"Not much," he said coolly. "What sort of a fool am I, Mister? You cough up what cash you have."

"We've got nothing," I said. "This girl is a Russian. My friend's a tourist, just arrived from home. I'll make it worth your while, Sam—"

"Go chase yourself," he broke in. "Say, this skirt suits me! She'll make it worth my while, you bet! You and your friend can go join the fishes!"

He turned to his men, and spoke in Cantonese.

"Throw these two foreign devils overboard. First loose the woman and take her into the cabin for me."

They leaned over and freed Marie. As she rose, Sam Yung reached forward and pinched her cheek. Then he went staggering back as she hit him full force. It was a beautiful crack that sent him sprawling, and his men burst out laughing. Next instant, the girl was flying at them.

Then Sam Yung was on his feet, and knocked her to the deck. One of his men dropped on her, wrenched away the knife, and threw it over the rail. Sam Yung got her by the hair and held her bent over backward, agonized, squirming helplessly. He was a big fellow, too.

"Some skirt, big boy!" he observed. "I like 'em rough. Well, give my regards to the fishes, and maybe I'll see you some day."

He flung a command at his men. I saw Stanley roll over, struggling vainly, and knew he had waked up. Too bad. It occurred to me that I might tell Sam Yung about the jade necklace—then I bit off the words on my very lips. With this scoundrel, it would not do us one bit of good. He would take the jade and kill us anyway. And I'd be hanged if I would see that devil get those jades.

Two of the men came up, seized Stanley, and dragged him toward the rail. I closed my eyes, for I did not want to see it done. . . .

"Hey, Sam Yung! Is that you, big feller?"

It was Stanley's voice, raucous and bellowing. I looked. The two men had swung him up and were in the very act of heaving him over. A yell burst from Sam Yung; he let the Russian girl go, and with a leap hurled himself at his men, catching hold of Stanley as they released him. All of them came to the deck together.

FOR a moment I thought I must be out of my head. Then rapid orders broke from Sam Yung. One of his men jumped to my side and the cords binding me were released. I got to my feet, saw Marie crouching against the deck-house, and heard Stanley's great laugh as he came toward us, with Sam Yung patting his back.

"It's all right, folks!" he exclaimed. "Brendon, meet my old client Sam Yung. I kept him out of San Quentin on a murder charge, get me? He's a good scout. Sam, these are friends of mine—"

"Glad to meet you, Mister,"—and that big devil plunged for my hand and actually pumped it cordially. "Listen, nothing's too good for my friend Stanley, see? He can have anything in China he wants! That goes for you too."

"Sam, this is my girl," and Stanley took the shrinking Marie in his arms. "We're going to be married tomorrow. You come to the wedding."

"I'll do that," said Sam Yung, grinning in the starlight.

"What about getting us to Shameen?" I put in, thinking of the jades in my pocket.

"Right off, big boy," said the Chinatown murderer. "I'll take you there safe, you bet!"

"And listen here," said Stanley, tapping him on the shoulder. "In a couple of days I'm going to organize or reorganize the police of this town, see? You drop around and see me in the morning, at the Shameen hotel. We'll line up a few things, and inside of a week I'll make you chief of police in this city of yours. Is it a go?"

The Fast One that Failed

Wherein racketeer methods are applied to the stockmarket and a corner collapses with a loud and dramatic crash.

By CHARLES S. LENT

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

THE comic strips aren't the only funny things in the papers—not by a darn' sight! If you're wise, you can read between the lines of your favorite New York newspaper and get a laugh on every page.

Well, that needn't surprise you when you come to think of the birds who draw down big salaries for acting as Public Relations Counsel. That's the high-hat name press-agents use these days. Public Relations, my eye! They're just the old circus advance-men with a college education.

But they're not the only ones who draw down easy dough. There is Tommy Mullins, who works with me in the office of Wells, Brown & Baird, a big Wall Street brokerage-house. I have to work hard for what they hand *me* every week—but he plays around to get his.

I run the Clearing-house Sheet; that's some job, in a firm as big as ours. Tommy is a customers' man. That means he has to bring in business. He went to college somewhere and was a sensation playing football. The reporters smeared his name and his picture over the sport pages; a hundred thousand people yelled their heads off when he was in the game; so the firm picked him for our customers' room. Pretty soft job he had! Going to work in the eight o'clock subway rush from Brooklyn, where I live, I frequently read something like this in the society news of my paper:

"Mr. and Mrs. E. Archibald Scroggins entertained at dinner in the Palm Room of the Hotel Splendid last night, afterward taking their guests to the theater. Among those in their party were: Miss Elsie Scroggins, Miss Beatrice Stuyvesant Disbrow, Count Antonio Perrati, and Mr. Thomas Mullins."

I translated that roughly about as follows: It meant that Wells, Brown & Baird have the Scroggins account sewed up and it's part of Tommy's job to keep it that way. Scroggins is a big oil man from Oklahoma and his account is a large and active one.

Others read that little item also. What they got out of it depended on how wise they were. Mrs. Henry Mitchell, wife of the superintendent of the Ajax Foundries, in a New Jersey suburb, read it and sighed. She was doing the breakfast dishes and what she thought resentfully was that it was a tough break for her that *she* couldn't dine in the Palm Room of the Hotel Splendid, and that rich society people have all the luck. . . .

William Doyle out in Oklahoma will read it too, when the clipping-bureau he subscribes to sends it in along with a lot of other items about the Scroggins family. Doyle snorts and decides that Scroggins has bats in his belfry to fall for this society stuff in New York, and that it's time for him to get busy. He goes into a huddle with his Public Relations Counsel, and what they cook up is plenty. Doyle and Scroggins had fought all over Oklahoma trying to get a strangle-hold on each other. They were both in oil up to their necks.

Now, I wouldn't know an oil-well if I met one. The nearest I've ever been to Oklahoma was when I went out to the end of Pier 55, North River, to wave to some one on a boat starting for Europe. You'd naturally think that a fight about oil-wells out West between a customer in the office of Wells, Brown & Baird and this Doyle wouldn't or couldn't possibly involve me. Yes, that's what you'd think—but you got another think coming.

It was a month or more after one dinner about which I'd read in the paper, that Tommy Mullins came running up to me about quitting-time. He was all out of breath and wanted to know did I have a date for that evening. As it happened, I didn't.

"Fine!" says he. "Save my life, kid, by going on a party with me tonight! I'm taking a couple of swell dames out and I need another fellow. One of them has just about made up her mind to switch her account to us. If I throw a good peppy party tonight, it's a cinch she'll do some of her trading here. But I got to have another man, for she's bringing a friend along."

"What's her friend like?" was the first thing I asked.

"I never saw her, but she's sure to be some one classy. Mrs. Maitland has an apartment at the Hotel Splendid, has lots of money, and is a swell looker. You don't have to worry about anyone she brings along—any friend of hers is sure to be a pippin."

"Scram, kid. I'm not going."

"Oh, have a heart, Bill. I've got to have another fellow."

I shook my head. "Nope. I'm not going on a blind date with anyone. That's what it is, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, in a way. Except I tell you that you don't run any risk. Mrs. Maitland is way up socially and she won't bring any pooch along with her."

I didn't want to go on a party with Tommy much anyway. He's a good guy, but it had taken him a long while to know I was on the map. Then I'm not keen for this Park Avenue stuff—dames with money, who've seen everything, done everything, and are bored stiff. I like a party with some pep as well as the next one, but I get no kick at all from mixing with "society." So I just shook my head and started to get ready to go home.

Then the kid came clean with me. He was in a jam. One of his college friends had promised to go, but the guy had ditched him at the last minute and he had to get some one else. He told me how important this Mrs. Maitland's account might be to the firm and said it was my duty to go. Well, when he put it that way, I couldn't refuse. I'd be working for Wells, Brown & Baird if I helped swing a new account. So finally I was fool enough to say I'd go.

It was arranged that I was to meet Tommy at the College Club and I hurried home to dress. I found my kid brother Archie in possession of the bathroom when

I got to our apartment. I had to pound on the door and threaten him before he'd come out and give me a chance at the tub. He was taking a girl to a high-school dance that night and it wasn't my threats that brought him out. He wanted to make a touch. Seems he'd spent his allowance and he just had to take his girl in a taxi, and the dance was at a big hotel in New York—not in the high-school gym as they usually were. I told him the subway was still running when I came home and that I expected it would be when he started in. He explained how this was a "formal," the big dance of the year, and he couldn't take a girl in the subway. I'd meant all the time to slip him what he needed, so after lecturing him on extravagance I gave him what cash he needed —and a little more. We're all proud of the kid, you see. . . .

"Archie," I said, "this is Bill. How are you feeling, kid?" Then I got a good look at the fellow—he wasn't Archie at all!

I was a bit late meeting Tommy, and while we taxied from his club to the Hotel Splendid, I told him what had delayed me and a lot more about the kid. I thought Tommy would think the kid's touching me for taxi-fare rather funny, but he didn't seem to. Tommy needn't have been so worried about my being a little late, for Mrs. Maitland kept us waiting. I felt like a shipwrecked sailor on a raft, for I'm used to having my dinner around six o'clock and it was seven-thirty and later before Mrs. Maitland put in an appearance and her friend hadn't shown up yet.

Mrs. Maitland shook up some cocktails in her living-room while we waited, and I drank one. She was so darn' good-looking that I began to feel uneasy about my blind date again. The prettier a woman is, the homelier her friend is likely to be. A looker seldom has any brains, but she always has enough to realize that no matter how much of a queen she is, she looks even better in contrast with a friend who just escapes being knock-kneed and cross-eyed.

I was wrong about that, though, for when this Miss Robinson shows up she was easy on the eyes; I certainly hadn't drawn a lemon for the evening. The three of them had to have some more cocktails to celebrate Miss Robinson's arrival. I stuck to the one I'd had and no amount of coaxing could make me drink another. I'm funny that way; I don't like booze, and I don't see any reason I should drink if I don't want to. So while they licked up the "dividends," I went down to the hotel lobby and got the theater-tickets. The women had decided on a show that they'd seen before. Said we might be late arriving and so better see something they'd seen before. Wells, Brown & Baird had an account with the broker in the lobby, and I signed for four on the aisle. I had a shock when I saw what that pirate soaked the firm for them. Eleven iron men apiece for theater-tickets is going some! Why, with a ten-spot *I* can see a show, take my girl for a bite afterward and have some small change left when I get her home! Forty-four dollars for four seats was robbery. It wasn't my money, but even so I said *"ouch"* under my breath as I signed for them.

We hopped a taxi and rode four blocks to a ritzy restaurant, and before long I had real food in front of me. It was about time, and I fell on that food like a wolf on the fold. It was eight o'clock, two hours past my regular dinner-time. I got along with this Miss Robinson fine. She was easy to look at, a peppy talker with a good line and I'd about decided that a blind date wasn't so bad after all, when trouble started.

Tommy had a flask and he mixed up some drinks. I left mine untouched.

"We're waiting for you, Bill," Tommy said, holding up his glass.

"I'm not drinking, thank you," I told him.

It's funny why I refused, too, for I'm no prohibitionist. But I'd had a cocktail back at the Hotel Splendid and I considered that plenty. I'm taking that extension course and mean to get ahead, and didn't mean to handicap myself with booze. I'd been reading lately about a lot of bad booze around New York and what it did to you, and I was suspicious of the stuff Tommy carried on his hip. Tommy can play football, or could—though what with fighting booze and late hours and never taking any exercise, I doubted if he could play ping-pong now; but at his best he's no great mental giant and I knew any bootlegger could put it over on him. Then, too, Tommy had a slight edge on; he'd licked up several cocktails before we started from the Splendid and the girls had had as many. This was evidently going to be a wringing wet party and I made up my mind that one member must be in condition to get the others home, if necessary. I refused the drink.

The three of them thought I was joking. When they found I wasn't, Tommy tried to browbeat me and the women to coax me. Something Mrs. Maitland said got me mad, and then I wouldn't have touched any of that booze

if I'd been paid for it. I cut the argument short by asking Miss Robinson to dance, and the storm blew over. Tommy was sore and sulky, but nothing more was said and the others had several drinks during dinner.

In the taxi on the way to the theater, Tommy got back at me by telling the two women about Archie. He dragged in the bathtub and about my being late and ended with:

"Why didn't you go to the high-school dance, Bill? I imagine that's about your speed."

I'd have liked to give him a swift punch in the jaw!

"Just fancy, only one bathtub!" was Mrs. Maitland's comment.

One bathtub is plenty for a family of four. We're not goldfish, parked in the tub all the time; and our apartment's no tenement—though her tone inferred that it was. . . .

We were plenty late for the theater; not that it made any difference—I could have stood it to've been even later. It wasn't worth a dime. It had a lot of dirty jokes and *risqué* songs. The dancing was swell, but they didn't dance all the time. When I thought what they'd soaked us for the tickets it made me wild. Why, any talkie in town—and some of them were not so hot that week—would have been a better bet. Yet the place was packed; I never saw so many ermine coats in one place, nor so many orchids outside of a florist's window. No dame there considered she was dressed without an orchid.

Tommy did his best to put some pep into the party that he considered I'd ruined, and I backed him up the best I knew how. I felt it was my fault the party had gone sour on him—after all, he made his living bringing in new accounts, and I was willing to do anything but drink. Mrs. Maitland turned to me after the first act and acted as if she was really interested in Archie. She made me tell her about the kid, acted real human for the first time that evening. Did I tell her? Say, we are proud of the kid and I told her all I could think of. How he was boy leader of the Honor Society, got a medal in math, was captain of the swimming team, and how the girls all fell for him, yet he wasn't a bit spoiled; how the girl he'd taken to this dance was the daughter of a judge who was mighty influential in Brooklyn. I gave her an earful and she acted real interested, even asked in what hotel the dance was given. Just as I answered her, the curtain went up. As I turned away, I thought maybe she was "regular" behind that Park Avenue façade of hers.

Miss Robinson took her cue from her friend and was nice and agreeable, and I concluded I was forgiven for not drinking.

AFTER the second act, Mrs. Maitland said she wanted to phone, so we went to the lounge to smoke and find a phone-booth. There were telephone-booths in the lounge, but she disappeared in the ladies' room and was gone a long time. Her excuse was that she couldn't get a booth for the crowd around them. The curtain was up when we got back upstairs and we stumbled into our seats. The show was pretty raw toward the end, but the women with us never blinked. Guess they were used to it, but I made up my mind to warn the kid not to see it.

Tommy proposed a night-club after the show, but Mrs. Maitland refused. Said she didn't feel like dancing, and that she expected a phone-call, and why not go back to the Hotel Splendid. That's what we did, and went in the grill. They have a peach of an orchestra there and I had the best time I'd had all evening, dancing. I like to dance and both the dames with us were swell dancers. Tommy drank a lot and I was glad to see his flask run dry, for I knew it wasn't likely he could get anything more to drink there. Then Mrs. Maitland proposed we go up to her apartment, where she had plenty. I was ready to call it a night; it was one o'clock by now and I was ready to go home, but the women coaxed so hard that I said I'd go for a little while.

Once up in the Maitland apartment, Tommy cut loose and the women egged him on. Not that he needed much urging, but Mrs. Maitland had enough booze to stock a bar, and filled his glass the minute it was empty. I stayed cold sober, for I steadily refused to drink anything and in about an hour it dawned on me that Mrs. Maitland was deliberately trying to get Tommy drunk. I couldn't see any reason why she should, but she was. She didn't urge me to drink, but concentrated on Tommy.

I GOT wise to what she was up to and I sensed something else—both women seemed waiting for something. Then I remembered the telephone-call she said she expected. I got more and more uneasy, for as Tommy got more drunk he blabbed boastingly of what he had said to this man and that, and what they had said to him—big men in the Street, all of them—that Cole the big steel man was short his own company's stock in our office—things like that—things he wasn't supposed to know, or tell if he did know 'em.

Mrs. Maitland steered the conversation around to Scroggins and oil-stock. My blood ran cold to hear what Tommy told her. I tried to hush him up, but I might as well have tried to dam Niagara. With Mrs. Maitland cooing to him and asking for more of the same I hadn't a chance to shut him up. She flattered him by telling him he was just the one to advise her and soon she'd be coming to him for a little flyer in the Street. I was just deciding that I'd have to drag him away by force, when the telephone rang.

Mrs. Maitland looked puzzled and said to Tommy: "For you," in a surprised tone.

Tommy lurched over to the phone and bawled: "Mullins speaking!"

We were all quiet. I was hoping that whatever the call was it would take him away from here; aside from that I had no interest in it.

But Tommy startled us all by saying suddenly: "Oh, my God!" And he nearly dropped the phone. Then he stared stupidly right at me, as he demanded: "Is he badly hurt?"

We all stirred uneasily. A moment before there had been laughter and talk in the room. Now at the suggestion of tragedy we were all silent. I tried to remember what I knew about Tommy's family and wondered if some relative of his was the one hurt. But I couldn't help being relieved! Tommy would leave now without urging. Tomorrow, when he was sober, I'd tell him what an idiot he had been, babbling office secrets all over the place; but whatever the bad news was that was coming over the wire, he'd go away from here now.

Tommy spoke into the phone again.

"Give me that again, please. Yes—yes, we'll be right over." Turning to me, he called: "Bill, write this down. Be careful—get it straight. Hotel Baltimore—Room 1408. Have you got that, Bill?"

"Hotel Baltimore, Room 1408," I called back to him, as I wrote it down on a card I took from my wallet.

"We'll be right over," Tommy assured whoever was on the other end of the phone; then he slowly hung up.

Whatever the message was, it had sobered him. He stood still, staring right at me. He looked haggard and wild, but sober. We all waited breathlessly to hear the bad news. From the way he looked it couldn't be anything else but bad. Then in a low voice, almost a whisper, he said:

"Bill—it's Archie!"

I thought I was prepared for almost anything. I was, except for anything that concerned *me*. I'd been sitting down, but this brought me to my feet, and I looked at Tommy incredulously. I couldn't speak; I couldn't grasp it. All I could do was to stare at Tommy.

Mrs. Maitland was the first to speak.

"Archie? You mean the young brother? Oh, no!"

Still I couldn't speak. I could hear my heart pounding, but I couldn't say a word.

"What has happened to the boy?" Mrs. Maitland demanded.

With a helpless gesture, Tommy answered: "A taxi smash."

I groaned. A taxi smash! I remembered how the kid had made the touch for his taxi-fare. I could see how he looked, so young and pleading, so earnest—and so sure that he simply had to take his girl to this dance in a taxi. I'd given him the money—and he'd been hurt. I felt like a murderer. Oh, why hadn't I refused? Then I remembered how the kid looked. I couldn't refuse him anything in reason—and now he was hurt, dying, maybe!

"Is he badly hurt, Tommy?" I gasped.

"Pretty bad, Bill, I'm afraid—from what they said. There's a doctor there but they said for you to hurry."

"Tommy," I said sharply, "he's not—" I couldn't say the word *dead*.

I recovered consciousness to find myself gagged and bound. One of the men came to my side and said: "Sorry; I hit you harder'n I meant to!"

Tommy was quick to reassure me: "No—no, Bill—not dead, but badly hurt. They said to hurry."

And hurry we did. In a daze I remember going down in the elevator, crossing the lobby, and pitching headlong into a taxi. The Hotel Baltimore was not twenty blocks away from the Splendid, and we were soon there. I flung some money to the driver, and was out and in the lobby in a moment. We raced for the elevator.

"Fourteenth floor—quick!" I ordered.

I must have looked wild, I was so nearly crazy with worry about Archie. The operator took one look at me and shot the car up. As the car went swiftly to the fourteenth floor I thought of how this would hit us all. Archie, the kid we were all so proud of, hurt—if anything happened to the kid we'd never get over it. I counted the floors—seven—eight—nine—ten. I moved toward the door of the car, ready to leap out the moment I could. Eleven—twelve; there wouldn't be any thirteenth floor—hotel guests were superstitious, didn't like it. That made what they called the fourteenth floor really the thirteenth—and Archie was in a room on the thirteenth floor! I shuddered.

"Room 1408, buddy—which way?" I asked as the elevator-door slid open.

"To your right, gentlemen, to your right."

Panting, I ran down the corridor to the right and stopped before a room marked 1408. I was afraid to knock, afraid of what I might find on the other side of that door. Tommy was right beside me, and he knocked. A moment's delay, then the door swung open and I rushed in and across the room to a bed where a young fellow lay with his face turned toward the wall. A man stood beside the bed—a doctor, I assumed, and I noticed vaguely that there were others in the room.

"Archie," I said softly, leaning over the boy on the bed, "this is Bill. How are you feeling, kid?"

I got a good look at the fellow as I leaned over him and straightened up in amazement, for the boy on the bed wasn't my kid brother Archie at all! I'd never seen him before. Bewildered, I looked around the room and saw that Tommy was scuffling with two men just inside the door. I saw that; then I saw nothing for a time, for something hit me on the head and I fell to the floor.

Sometime later I recovered consciousness, to find myself gagged and bound. My hands were tied behind my back, my ankles were tied together and a gag was in my mouth. Lying on the floor near by was Tommy, similarly trussed up. My head ached and I didn't know what had happened to me. Then I remembered that somewhere in this hotel Archie was hurt and needed me. I struggled vainly and groaned. Because of the gag in my mouth I didn't really groan—it was more like a gurgle. But one of the men in the room came to my side and said, not unkindly: "Sorry, I hit you harder'n I meant to, bub.

You're the one who has a brother, aren't you? Well, don't worry about him. He's dancing up in the ballroom on the twenty-seventh floor. He's not hurt; that was just a stunt to make sure you'd come. You understand, fellow? He's not hurt—nothing's the matter with him at all. And you two—nothing more's going to happen to *you*. Just lie still and after the Exchange closes some one will set you free."

Gosh, you have no idea of the relief I felt. Archie wasn't hurt, dead or dying. This was a hold-up. Well, they were welcome to anything I had on me. What was money compared to what I thought had happened to Archie?

I was so relieved that I felt groggy for a moment. Tears came to my eyes but I wasn't ashamed of them. I wouldn't have to break bad news to the folks—and we wouldn't have to go on living at home with no Archie. The kid was having a swell time up on the twenty-seventh floor. For I believed the guy who'd told me Archie wasn't hurt. There was something about his voice that told me he was telling me the truth.

Why I was here, why I'd been lured to this room, I didn't know or care. Archie was safe. That was all that mattered. I had less than one hundred dollars in my pockets, a small loss compared to what I had feared.

The men lifted Tommy to the bed and prepared to leave the room. One had a "Do Not Disturb" sign in his hand.

"I'll put this over the doorknob outside and then no chambermaid will be coming in to find them," he explained. "I'll go downtown to report to Doyle and the rest of you scatter. Roy, when the Exchange closes you come back and let 'em loose. We won't all go at once. Paul, you and Roy leave now. Jim, you follow them in ten minutes—and I'll leave last of all and put this sign on the door. Ready, fellows?"

Two of the men went out, then after an interval a third and a little later the fourth man. He tried the cords around my wrists and around Tommy's the last thing before he went out. There were a hundred questions I wanted to ask him, but I couldn't speak with that gag in my mouth.

After he'd gone, I rolled over on my side and looked at Tommy. He looked back and it was evident he was as puzzled as I was. I tried to think, but my head ached and I found it hard work. I had a single clue and that was the name *Doyle* I had heard.

I mulled that over in my mind. Doyle—that was the name of Scroggins' enemy and business rival out in Oklahoma. Doyle—why should he pick on me or Tommy? Slowly, I remembered: Mrs. Maitland had been interested in Scroggins. She'd asked a lot of questions about him and, like a fool, Tommy had answered them. He'd told her what Scroggins was doing in the market. He'd spilled a lot of information he had no right to.

I puzzled over that for a time, staring at Tommy as I did it. Doyle and Mrs. Maitland—there was a connection there. And that wasn't all. No one but Tommy, Mrs. Maitland and Miss Robinson knew that I had a brother Archie and that he'd gone to a dance in this very hotel. What's more, no one else knew he'd gone in a taxi. What was the connection here?

There must be one. Then I remembered Mrs. Maitland's phoning from the theater and insisting on going back to her apartment at the Splendid because she expected a phone-call. It had come and brought us on the run to this room and now we were tied up and helpless. Why? That's what puzzled me. Employees of Stock Exchange houses are forbidden to speculate. I didn't own any stock on margin and although I have a good job I couldn't figure that I was important enough to have attracted the attention of this Doyle. I couldn't do him any harm.

"It must have been some party!" "I've been on worse, kid," I assured him.

Couldn't I, though? Then the pieces of this puzzle fell into place—and at last I was wise. I could spill to Scroggins the fact that Mrs. Maitland had got out of Tommy what he, Scroggins, was doing through Wells, Brown & Baird. That clicked with the fact that we were to be released when the market closed that day. Gee, but I'd been dumb!

Doyle was going after Scroggins in the market. He wanted us safely out of the way till the Exchange closed that day. If he'd taken all the pains to do this to me it must be something big that was on foot. I had to warn Scroggins. That's why Tommy and I were important to Doyle. Those dames had meant to get us both drunk. Then I wouldn't have heard all the indiscreet things Tommy had said. My refusal of booze had upset their plans, but Mrs. Maitland was resourceful. She'd thought up another plan, and it had worked.

I lay there mulling all this over and decided that I must get word to Scroggins. What Doyle planned wasn't some little thing. He was out to break Scroggins and I must warn him. I looked around the room. The telephone gave me an idea. I'd read of people who'd tipped over the telephone and Central had sent some one to investigate when she couldn't get an answer. Nothing would be easier than for me to get across the room some way and upset the phone. In a hotel they would investigate quicker than ordinarily. I gave myself a pat on the back for thinking of this.

My idea was O. K., and maybe it might have worked. I don't know, for when I tried to swing my feet over the

side of the bed in an effort to hop to the phone, I found that my feet were securely tied to the footboard, with the ropes tied around my ankles as well. Some one else had thought of the possibility of my being able to give the alarm that way. I tugged and I twisted, I rolled and I turned—but couldn't get my feet free. I looked at Tommy's feet; he was tied to the footboard too. I rolled back impatiently and it was then I discovered that my turning and twisting had some effect. The gag in my mouth was loose.

I had to rest for a few minutes; then I started my twisting and turning again. Finally I got the gag out of my mouth. Gee, what a relief!

THE first use I made of being able to talk was to cuss Tommy out good and proper. It was a great satisfaction, for he was still gagged and couldn't talk back.

I explained what had happened to us and how it was all his fault. Then I considered our position. I could speak, but I was still helpless. I decided to call for help. I yelled till I was hoarse—but much good it did me! The Hotel Baltimore has thick walls and apparently no one heard me. My throat ached before I gave that up as a total loss. I turned to Tommy, for I'd had another idea.

"Roll over, dumb-bell; I want to see how your hands are tied," I told him.

He rolled over meekly, and my heart gave a jump when I saw that his hands were tied with a man's handkerchief. They'd used cord on mine. I twisted and squirmed till I could reach Tommy's hands with my teeth. I remembered in a movie how the hero untied a knot with his teeth. Maybe it was a fool idea and wouldn't work, but it was the only thing I could think of.

Say, some day when you have plenty of time and both your hands and feet free, just try to untie a simple knot with your teeth. Then you'll realize what I was up against. I did it—but I didn't do it quickly. It took me the better part of an hour, and daylight was coming into the room, before I had Tommy's hands free.

He reached up and undid his own gag and then managed to get his feet untied. A few minutes later I was free, and I staggered over to the phone.

"What are you going to do?" Tommy demanded. "Call the police?"

"Police nothing," I told him. "I'm going to call Scroggins and try to undo some of the harm you've done." I looked at my watch. The time was eight-thirty. Scroggins wouldn't have left his house yet. I called his home, and a butler answered.

The butler was sorry, but Mr. Scroggins was in his bath. I couldn't speak to him.

"Say, buddy," I told that butler, "I don't care where your boss is, I got to speak to him; he can be in two baths for all I care,—or dying,—but you get him to the phone. I'll see to it that you're fired if you don't get him to the phone inside of three minutes and what he'll do to you will be plenty. You tell him it's some of Doyle's—D-o-y-l-e, is the name—some of his dirty work I want to talk about. You tell him that, and he'll come."

The butler sputtered. I just reminded him he was using up those precious three minutes. . . . A moment later I heard Scroggins' angry bark over the wire.

"Hey," I told him, "this is Bill—Bill from Wells, Brown & Baird's office. A crowd of Doyle's hijackers collared Tommy Mullins and me last night and kept us prisoners. . . . Yeah, I know I can't expect you to get all steamed up over what happened to *us*, but you're in this. They intended to keep us prisoners till after the Exchange closes today so we couldn't warn you. They got it in for you; they're after your hide. . . . Oh, yeah, I know that aint news to you; I know you and Doyle've been fighting for years. But, listen, they got Tommy Mullins drunk and he spilled what you're doing in the Street just now. Doyle is going to pull something special on you today, so watch your step."

That old gorilla's mind works fast. In no time at all he was yelling his orders to me.

"What's that?" I said. "Stay where we are—don't come down to the office? Say, who'll do my work? . . . . You'll square it with the firm? Yes, I'm listening—yes, I get you. Well—we *could*. Wait a moment; hold the wire—I want to speak to Tommy."

I turned to Tommy.

"He says to stay here; let them think we're still tied up, let them think the plan is working. He'll square us at the office—and he's going to take Doyle for a ride and he'll carry some Amalgamated Petroleum for each of us and he'll promise us a sweet profit before the day's over. Shall we do it?"

Tommy nodded his head, "Yes." He had to; it was up to him to do anything to try and square himself after the trouble he'd made.

I turned back to the phone.

"It's O. K. here. We'll do our part. You do yours and sock him good. Yeah, you can depend on us, but if the others come back don't expect me to commit murder, or arson, or bigamy. I've had about enough of other folks' fights. Get going!" And I hung up and yawned.

We sat around and smoked and wondered what was going on downtown. We were hungry, sleepy and tired, but we stuck it out. The hours dragged by. At two o'clock we started to get ready to leave and at two-fifteen, just as the gong was sounding that ends trading for the day on the Exchange, Tommy and I softly closed the door of that hotel bedroom and fairly ran for an elevator. We went to the office in our evening clothes and old man Scroggins met us and did a war dance with us in the customers' room. Profanity and ticker-tape were about equally mixed in the celebration.

Little by little we found out what had happened. The tabloids had it later, though not the real inside dope. They called it, "Giants Battle For Oil Control." A much better title would have been: "Scroggins Takes Doyle to the Cleaners."

Doyle had sold Amalgamated Petroleum short, thinking he'd caught Scroggins over-extended. Scroggins didn't come to the support of his stock and Doyle thought it was because he couldn't, and trebled his short sales. Till an hour before closing, Doyle had it all his own way. Then Amalgamated began to show some pep and to stage a comeback. When Doyle decided to run to cover there wasn't any stock at any price and by closing time the Street knew that there was a corner in Amalgamated Petroleum.

That night late, Scroggins' lawyers met Doyle's lawyers and made a settlement. The "sweet profit" I'd been promised on the stock Scroggins carried for me ran into more than my year's salary plus a two years' bonus. Tommy's was the same.

I STARTED home with my overcoat buttoned up around my neck to hide my evening clothes. When I got home Archie was in the living-room bent over his books. Gee, but it seemed good to see him!

"How was the party, kid?" I asked him.

"Oh, swell! A big crowd, fine music, good floor. How was yours? If it lasted till now it must have been some party!"

"I've been on worse, kid," I assured him, with a yawn; and I went to find my mother, to square myself with her.

Comrades of Chaos

Two Americans fight through terrific experiences in that amazing land the Russia of the Soviets—and of the anti-God posters, the Secret Police, the rule of Terror and a communism of distress.

By S. ANDREW WOOD

Illustrated by Joseph Franké

The Story So Far:

ELSA PETERSON stood at the window in Apartment House 187, Karl Marx Street, waiting for her brother Martin. This had been the house of her father, the English scientist, and the beautiful Countess Nikolai, his wife. And now—it was like a cheese that teems with maggots, inhabited by a score of families billeted there.

It was rather terrible to be only half-Russian in the Red Republic. Worse still, when the Russian half came from the hated aristocrat blood, even though Elsa and Martin were citizens of the Soviet—even though Comrade Elsa slaved in the dispensary of the Lenin Hospital.

Nitchevo! What did it matter? It had been a lovely house, and she had had a lovely mother and a fine father; but they were dead, and the Government had taken the house, turned it into a barracks, and filled it with five hundred people. It was now Apartment House 187.

Martin came in from his work, and they ate their scanty supper. "I wonder if John Worden ever thinks of us, now," observed Martin presently.

A little tinge of color surged over Elsa's thin cheeks.

"Why should he? He's safe in America, and he's rich and—happy, I expect; a bloated capitalist, Martin."

"Old John Worden a bloated capitalist!" Martin laughed softly and shook his head. "No fear. He's the old hell-for-leather John, for a certainty."

Somehow the name of John Worden lightened the dingy apartment. Yet tragedy lay in memory of him. John Worden had been their demi-god six years before. They were children in their 'teens, and he was a great, clean-limbed giant of twenty, with blue eyes that laughed at the lean years and the lean people about him. And then one snowy night, in the days of the Tcheka, the blow fell. The secret police came very swiftly and silently, as they always did. John Worden's father and mother were pistoled as they walked through the dark garden to the waiting prison-van.

While the suave explanations of an "accident" were being made, David Peterson and his Russion wife were sent to the Siberian timber-camps. They had both died on the way, peacefully, it was said, in each other's arms.

Somehow, John Worden had got out of the very teeth of the Tcheka, escaped from Russia, reached England and then America—to be successful in that dear, sane country which seemed to belong to another planet. And Elsa and Martin Peterson were left behind in the chaos. . . .

But this evening another blow fell. For again the dreaded secret police appeared, asking questions about one John Worden. Martin was hauled off to the sinister Butyrka prison—where he was "questioned rather severely."

The police had indeed reason to ask questions about John Worden. For it was he himself, disguised as a workman, who spoke to Elsa next day. He had come back to Russia to rescue them—and to exact vengeance from Boris Vladimir, who was responsible for his father's death.

Worden was to have still greater cause for vengeance, it appeared; for Boris Vladimir told Elsa that he would secure Martin's release if she would come to him at his "house of the red door." And when Elsa saw how Martin had been tortured, she consented. Just in time John Worden appeared, knocked out the Cossack, and drugged him. Then with Elsa, and the order for Martin's release, Worden went to the prison, brought away the badly injured Martin—and laid a plan for their escape out of Russia.

This plan was made to fit the new Russia. The three went to the Marriage and Divorce Bureau and pretended that Martin was Elsa's husband, of whom she was tired, and that Worden was her lover, whom she wished to marry. In a few moments Elsa obtained a "divorce" from Martin and a certificate of "marriage" to Worden. Their false identities thus established by documents they took a train for the Polish frontier. . . . .

But the Ogpu—animated by Feodora Federoff, a beautiful but terrible young woman mockingly called the "Bright Angel of the Butyrka" and who had known and perhaps loved Worden in earlier days—caught up with them when they left the train near the frontier. They escaped by a desperate ruse, but Martin, succumbing at last to the wounds inflicted upon him, died in a monastery where they took refuge. Worden and Elsa fled to the village of Borodotchi, close to the Polish frontier; but here, as they were about to make a final dash for liberty, the Ogpu overtook them.

They told Worden that Elsa had been allowed to go free, to leave Russia. With his own eyes he saw her start for the frontier; and he then decided that his own plans could be best furthered by

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accepting Feodora's proposed alternative to imprisonment—that he himself join the terrible secret police called the Gay-pay-oo.

Secretly, however, Elsa was recaptured and put to work in an underground factory for the production of poisonous war gasses. A fire in this hell-pit nearly cost her life but provided opportunity for escape instead. And another American—a wild little, good little Texan named Nick Gunter—helped her and gave her shelter on a river barge where he was living in hiding with a Russian woman. For though Gunter had come to Russia to work for the Soviet, he had rebelled at the cause he was aiding, and had committed a serious act of sabotage which caused him to be outlawed.

Officially, Gunter was "dead"; but he had a friend at the British consulate, and he took Elsa thither, asking aid because of Elsa's English father. Governmental help could not be extended, however. But the consular official offered to call in a powerful Russian acquaintance and ask his help. The Russian came, and proved to be—Boris Vladimir! And presently a big Soviet car drove away from the consulate carrying Elsa and Gunter and Vladimir, with the Russian's giant Mongol servant driving.

They saw the revolver-butt drop on his head. . . . Blackness dropped with a dull explosion upon each of them at almost the same second.

At the Kremlin, Gunter was put out while Vladimir drove on with Elsa. Promptly two Ogpu guards placed Gunter under arrest. He knocked one down, made a wild attempt at escape, but a rifle-butt cut his flight short. *(The story continues in detail:)*

IN his rooms near the big Palace, Boris Vladimir had sent away his robot-like secretary, and closed the door. A wash of yellow-gold sunlight came in from the winter day outside. It lit his almond eyes and dark, delicate face.

"Life is sometimes a thing to laugh at, Elsa," he said. "In this case, you laugh with bitterness and me with triumph. Shall we laugh together?"

Elsa was silent. In some way, she knew, Vladimir was changed; far more subtle than many of the brutal simpletons about him as he had always been, he was more subtle still now, gentler, restrained.

"Our American friend had to go. All the police were looking for him. Stalin himself has inspected Mr. Gunter's *dossier*. A humble Commissar doesn't know what the game is, but I think we're going to prove to America that there is no truth in the stories that certain foreign engineers working in Russia under the Five-Year Plan have been secretly shot for sabotage. Mr. Gunter may be publicly tried, proved guilty, and generously acquitted."

"You brought him here deliberately," said Elsa. She felt she had to speak.

"Did I?" Vladimir's eyebrows went up. "Mr. Gunter insisted. He's an insistent man. And you—even you did not resist."

Elsa looked out upon the spires and palaces of the Kremlin. Vladimir watched her tired profile for a few moments, and then moved quietly away from her to his desk. His eyes glowed a little as he opened a drawer and took forth some kind of document.

"Pray accept it, Elsa. I worked hard for it."

It bore the red seal of the Council and the signature of Stalin himself. In black lettering it set forth that the State and the Council pardoned the crimes of which Elsa Peterson had been found guilty and sentenced to death for; that she received back all her privileges as a loyal citizen of the Soviet, and was to go unmolested from then onward. It swam a little before Elsa's eyes, with a vague mockery. Yet involuntary gratitude, a sudden softening she could not help, came with it.

"Did you get it for me?"

"I did. I personally vouched for you. The Council holds me responsible for the good behavior of Citizen Elsa Peterson. So we will not laugh at each other after all, Elsa."

A sense of capture that was not physical came to Elsa.

Boris Vladimir took her hand as he spoke, but released it again; he was fearful of scaring her. She wondered drearily where John Worden was at that moment and whether he knew that Boris Vladimir had vouched for her. It was strange to think of herself as a free citizen of Moscow again—if anybody there was free.

"Can you see any change in me, Elsa?"

"Yes, but—you were very pleasant to Nick Gunter."

"That was for Russia. One can cheat and betray for the State, though one gets a little bored with that." Vladimir lowered his glance as though he wished to hide some secret that he kept to himself. "Once I could do it for myself too—to get you. Moscow tricks, Elsa. I'm leaving Moscow. They're making me Commissioner at Tiflis. I have the honor to ask you if you will marry me and come with me as my wife."

"You told me once that marriage was an institution that would soon be abolished."

"In Moscow, perhaps. But we should leave Moscow."

Quite suddenly, Vladimir's voice shook as though some control dropped away from it.

"That night I saw you in the W. E. F. I changed. This hole—Moscow! I hate it," he said fiercely. "Come with me. Do you still think of Worden? Russia is too strong for both of you. He can do nothing for you, you nothing for him. He's doomed—I swear it. . . . In Tiflis there are rose-gardens, and Moscow is far away. The old Ivans, the old Czars, loved Tiflis." Vladimir spoke musingly, with a cloudy glow in his eyes that made Elsa remember the words she had overheard the Bright Angel speak in Voronov's house at Minsk: "All Russians are a little mad . . . He thinks himself a reincarnation of Ivan the Terrible, though he believes nobody knows it."

Elsa was again looking out of the window; she faced further memories—of how John Worden and the Bright Angel had looked into each other's eyes at their first meeting in Minsk, each under their different spell. A free woman, but clamped to Russia; Martin dead, and she all but friendless, save, perhaps, for the outcasts of the timber-hulk—and Boris Vladimir. That was Elsa Peterson now. She tried to face it bravely, but courage flickered. It was a long lane with no turning—not even death, it seemed.

"I didn't wish to mention it; I thought it unfair. But—there it is before your eyes."

Vladimir stood behind her, pointing. Two people had come from the Gothic doorway opposite, and stepped over the heaped-up snow to a car that waited for them. She knew both those clipped fair heads, for they belonged to John Worden and Feodora Federoff, the Bright Angel. Worden's whimsical smile as he bent down to throw furs over the woman, swam in a mist before Elsa's eyes. She wanted to cry out to him through the window-glass—and then they were gone.

"He's destroyed," said Vladimir, almost somberly. "If I should try to kill him, it would only be in self-defense. There's no escape for him."

PERHAPS, in his inmost heart, John Worden, too, felt that the way of escape for him was narrowing and closing. It left him reckless, since beyond his momentary encounter with Anna Georgievna he could find no trace of Elsa. He read grimly the Soviet accusation in the official newspaper, that the American Gunter had deliberately fired the tenement and perished with it. That trail was false, but there was no other. Though he sought for Anna Georgievna and the mysterious American, it was useless.

He did not stay at the house with the scarlet door after the old woman had gone. Vladimir alive might lead him by some slender thread to Elsa, he reflected, whereas Vladimir dead could not. Carefully and methodically, with a skill the Ogpu was teaching him, he had gone through Vladimir's papers without discovering anything.

Only Feodora remained, beautiful and inscrutable. Sometimes Worden thought he read mockery in the cool agate of her eyes and then, again, something fiercer. Under the red and green sky-signs of Moscow at night, he and the Bright Angel moved together on many strange missions, some of which concerned the loyalty of Boris Vladimir, but never led to Elsa. Worden felt no more than a small spider, weaving his strand of a gigantic web . . . Once, on one of the river bridges, a pistol cracked in the black shadows and the bullet tore the shoulder of his leather coat. He heard Feodora's laugh.

"Your Mongol friend. Are you still determined to keep his skin for yourself?"

Worden found himself flinching at Feodora's laugh. Yet the deadly fascination of her deepened. She was like some dangerous drug he would have thrown away, but dared not—a woman in some mediæval legend, half-witch, half-woman, utterly Cossack. The ordinary standards did not apply to her. She could reveal her passion and yet remain remote and slightly taunting. . . .

"If you're thinking of your reputation," she said, watching him, "—these people are quite sure you're my lover. They don't worry a bit. In fact I'm certain that is why they invited you to come with me."

IT was a studio-party of Glazounova, the new *ballerina*. Glazounova's studio was in one of the old palaces; on cushions on the parquet floor the artists of theater, cinema and opera—all Soviet-branded and graded—lounged and ate from little dishes. The lights were dim, the room heavily scented. Somewhere in the yellow gloom a piano played drowsily. The Five-Year Plan was locked out. It was old Russia that dreamed and ate and made love in Glazounova's studio for a brief time.

"That's good of them. I hope I pass with honors," said Worden.

"For my sake? I think you do. But if they knew the comic truth,—that you had changed places with Koregorvsky as the St. Anthony of the Kremlin,—they would gasp and gather round to pinch you, just to see if you were real. They're like children or savages—quite as innocent."

"They look it," said Worden dryly.

"You can't see them," murmured Feodora, "not half of them. Any more than they can see us or wish to see us. This is the only bit of Bohemia left in Moscow. The Government has put a rubber-stamp on it, because you can't expect artists to behave like ordinary people. And Art is good propaganda. But no politics tonight."

She leaned her cheek on her hand as she lay on her cushions with a cigarette. Somewhere through the blur of smoke Glazounova was dancing to the piano. Some giant with a torpedo beard rushed to the *ballerina* and caught her like a child in his arms, kissing her passionately as he ran back with her to the corner from which she had escaped. Another man who, Worden thought, had been quietly weeping for the woes of Russia, suddenly sprang to his feet with his glass aloft, and called the health of the divine Glazounova in a heartbroken voice, after which he dashed his glass to fragments on the parquet floor. Nobody took the slightest notice.

"We're all mad," Feodora commented. "Stalin, building thousands of factories all over Russia—and these people, who know they may be in the Butyrka next week. All mad! You'll grow mad with us, Big John."

Worden looked down at the snowy throat as Feodora's soft weight leaned against him.

"By God, you're beautiful!" he said roughly. "Why

do you want me? I don't trust you, Feodora."

"I'm sorry, pretty maiden!" Nobody but Feodora could have said that, with her lips on his. He kissed her harshly, and she slipped closer, laughing—that laugh that made him flinch, and wish to strangle her. . . . He found that his fingers held the stalk of her throat, but he was too drunk with her to press hard upon it, lest he should stop the beating pulse that he could feel hammering against him. . . .

"Tell me—what did you do with Elsa Peterson that night?" he breathed.

She smiled, and answered sleepily, with the pagan frankness of one who admits herself a liar:

"Vladimir took charge of her before she reached the frontier. He insisted upon it. She's in Moscow now with him, I think. Does it matter?"

"There's no truth in you, you sorceress! Do you remember how faithfully you promised?"

"Yes. . . . Does it matter?"

"No."

Her fragrance stifled him. Some of the lights had gone out and it was smoky, hot twilight—an Oriental interior in the snow of Moscow.

"I'm an expert at getting into people's rooms by stealth. It's one of the first lessons you learn in the great Gay-pay-oo."

"I could strangle you now—easily. You resisted so long that I nearly want to."

"Not yet!" Worden's laugh was husky. "Too soon yet for you, and too late for me, Feodora. What would Glazounova do with the corpse of either of us? Listen! Get Elsa Peterson out of Russia for me. I don't want—I don't want her about."

"Ask Boris," she said, and pulled his face down to her again.

The piano was tinkling again, maddeningly. In that strangely animal atmosphere of gypsy eating and drinking and love-making, Glazounova had escaped from the arms of her lover and was dancing in white draperies under a glaring arc-light she had switched on suddenly. There were newcomers, for the folding doors were open to an icy draft of air.

"Do you still want to run away from me, Mitka Ivanovitch?" There was a touch of languor and cruelty in the tones.

"I can't," answered Worden. "I don't. Your lovers never ran away from you so soon, Feodora?"

"They never ran away."

Her kisses still burned him, yet he knew coldly that he still hated her—feared her too. The slender throat had been in his hands, but he did not know if she had told him the truth. And then with a chill he remembered that this was Russia. What if he, John Worden, had failed Elsa so fearfully, and Vladimir had found her?

"There's some champagne somewhere," said Feodora.

It was a quick and almost tigerish smile she threw at him as he went forward. Glazounova had stopped dancing, and a tenor from the Opéra was singing. The light touch of her arm in his made Worden feel that he belonged to her, body and soul. A great sickness came upon him; for an instant, he wished he had never returned to Russia and offered himself for crushing in that lunatic machine. Then he felt Feodora's fingers lightly pluck his sleeve. She had stopped to speak to somebody. The blood came to his cheek as he turned and saw the pale, delicate face and dark eyes of the man.

"Boris! I didn't know I should see a People's Commissar in this Bohemian haunt."

"Nor officers of the G. P. U.—even out of uniform, and in very lovely clothes." Vladimir bowed. "This is Miss Peterson."

"We have met," said Feodora, with a flashing smile. "All four of us have encountered before, I think. Rather like one of Gilbert and Sullivan's quartettes—though you don't know English comic opera, Boris."

Worden and Elsa found themselves looking into each other's eyes through the smoke of Glazounova's studio. Elsa was very pale but she forced a formal smile to her

lips. Worden saw it with a feeling that chains fell over both of them—chains of silence and despair. Something broken but still proud about her made him look away, only to meet the amused stare of Boris Vladimir.

"You are absorbed entirely by Russia, I see, Worden. Do you find it agreeable?"

"Not quite absorbed." With a great effort he refrained from striking the man down. "Not quite, Vladimir. But I do find it fascinating in its quick changes. The last time I saw Miss Peterson—"

"I ought to have told you," said Feodora tranquilly. "Boris obtained a free pardon for Miss Peterson. I imagine he is showing her a little of the bright side of life in Moscow before he takes up his new appointment in Tiflis."

"It sounds a safe-enough kennel," said Worden gauntly. "Does he go before or after he obtains a passport for Miss Peterson?"

"Before," answered Vladimir.

An hour later, Elsa passed out of the stifling atmosphere of Glazounova's studio, with a dull relief. Her head throbbed and she was becoming aware that the ache of the soul was worse than physical pain. There were things above-ground that could burn sharper than poisons of the W. E. F. John Worden, Elsa told herself, belonged to the Bright Angel. And perhaps soon she herself would belong to Boris Vladimir—his wife or not his wife. Things were so, in Russia.

She found herself laughing at some grimly gay story of modern Moscow that Vladimir told her. The sound of her own laughter was strange in her ears. They drove together in a droshky to the scarlet door in the Petrovka Place; but there they parted. In the high building above the scarlet door there loomed a warren of rooms inhabited by better-class workmen, and in one of these Vladimir had found lodgings for Elsa.

"I love you," he said simply. "I can wait for your answer."

Somewhat like those of a night-hunting animal his eyes were, for a moment. But Elsa, in her little room high over the Petrovka Place, forgot it. Nor did she remember in the days that followed, when she went to her work at the Lenin Hospital—for Boris Vladimir had got back that for her, and for a brief time everything seemed as it had been before Martin was buried beneath the trees at the Serguei monastery. When Vladimir went to Tiflis, she would go with him. *Nitchevo!*

Elsa sat in her room one night after a frugal supper. At that hour, a light was barely necessary. On a level with her high window, fire-signs zigzagged, streaked, and flared in flame—silver, green and lurid red. It was like some witches' dance above the snowy streets and the cringing people, as they fought for street-cars or hurried homeward on foot. Faintly through the closed windowpane came the whine of the propaganda loud-speaker. Elsa walked to the window and looked out into the darkness. Her thoughts were idle and languid. On the opposite wall a huge lighted

poster depicted Ivan the Peasant, laughing at a pot-bellied capitalist he trod underfoot—cruel, primitive laughter.

In the room something stirred, and Elsa turned sharply.

"It's I, Elsa. Don't put on the light."

It was John Worden. She knew the glint of fair hair at his temples, and the big angle of his jaw. He was silent, looking down at her from the shadowy wall, his face alternately lighted and darkened by the fitful signs outside. Then he moved quietly forward.

"I'm an expert at this—getting into people's rooms by stealth—because it's one of the first lessons you learn in the great Gay-pay-oo, and I knew the house with the scarlet door pretty well. The communicating staircase with this room is rather cute. But I traced it some days ago."

"Is there one?" asked Elsa slowly, and John Worden came forward to put his hands on her shoulders.

"Don't you know about it? There's no need to pretend, Elsa. This is Russia. We're down and out, both of us. And perhaps all that stuff we were taught to think so much of is the only comic nonsense these people say it is. 'Biological repression,' to use their damned jargon."

Elsa was not sure yet whether it was John Worden or a

dream. But, she told herself, she meant to act as though he was real. She shook her head.

"Don't let's talk about it. Boris Vladimir says he wants to marry me, and take me to Tiflis. That's all there is between us."

"What would Mitka Ivanovitch and that dirty clerk in the No. 3 Marriage and Divorce Office say to that?" asked Worden with a savage laugh.

"Or Feodora Federoff, if Mitka Ivanovitch tried to interfere? Oh, it's no use, no use!" Elsa cried out softly, in complete despair. In the glare from out of the window, she saw Worden whiten. Then he said slowly:

"That's what I came to tell you. About my love for you, and how —how it seems pretty useless. No one outside this devil-possessed country would understand, perhaps. I'm supposed to be the Bright Angel's lover—but I love you. And I can't help you because I'm of the Ogpu—watched, marked, stamped with the date I must be got rid of, for all I know. I thought I'd outwitted her that night in Borodotchi when I saw you safely started, I thought, for the frontier." He smiled crookedly. "I thought, the other night, that I could get out of her some news of you. I did. But it was too late." He ended quietly: "I came for your forgiveness, Elsa. I meant well."

Beneath the window was a gigantic fire-sign . . . The network of its myriad lights stretched down almost to the ground. He might fall; he might be electrocuted. But that was preferable to being shot by Vladimir or knifed by his servant . . . . Worden lowered himself into blinding radiance.

"You mean—there's no hope for us?"

"None that I can see. It was more desperate than I believed even when poor Martin was alive. And I was a free-lance then. Now I'm Menjinsky's man, one of a nest of born spies, who watch each other like adders. And you—do you trust Vladimir, Elsa? I give up my revenge, if you do."

"How can I say? He's Russian. He might do anything. It's dangerous for you to stay any longer. . . *What's that?*"

The fire-signs still sent fitful lightning in and out of the high little room. It seemed to Elsa that her door had creaked; then there came a quietly saturnine voice:

"Why, Worden, my friend! Keep your hand from your holster, man."

Worden moved quietly toward the speaker, ignoring the pistol-muzzle that kept in alignment with his heart. He said:

"I have no holster with me. I'm not on Ogpu business. Put that thing down, Vladimir. I want to talk, now you're here."

"About Miss Peterson?"

Worden stood near to the other man, his big shoulders hunched, his arms hanging.

"They're waiting till your *dossier's* full, at the Kremlin, Vladimir. If you think you've a clear road to run down to Tiflis, you're mistaken. That's a hint, and nothing more. They engaged me to destroy you; they thought I would put zest into it. If you mean to play straight, I'll throw up the game."

He saw that Vladimir watched him with eyes dancing bleakly behind half-closed lids. Then the light jumped into the room and revealed a finger tightening on the trigger, the black muzzle no more than a yard away, cool purpose in the Asiatic eyes. There was little time to act. Worden lashed at the Commissar's jaw and wheeled sideways as the weapon went off. The recoil made it fall from Vladimir's jarred fingers to the floor, but there was a twin shadow in the room which leapt upon Worden's shoulders and bore him down, by sheer weight. Yogatai had come close on the heels of his master.

Deliberate killing came alive in the little room above the Petrovka Place. Worden realized that Vladimir and his Mongol had trapped him there, and, as trappers kill their hare, meant to kill him. The fierce strength which sometimes comes from sheer contempt of life ran into him. As he went down, Yogatai's blade touched the flesh of his arm like a hot brad-awl, and all but pinned him. But he was on his feet with the fleshy mass of the man on his shoulders, and sent him sprawling upon Vladimir.

Then he found that his two assailants had made very certain of their quarry. The door was locked.

Yogatai came scuttling across the floor, his yellow face the mask of an animal, tense with murder.

Worden had retreated to the window. Turning his head for a moment to the only freedom that was visible, he saw

Worden's hand went out, and Feodora shrank back—but his arm fell nervelessly before he could seize her.

that the window-ledge here was a broad cornice running along the building. The big window creaked open at his thrust. Then he was on the cornice, and kicking at Yogatai's turnip-like head, as it rose from the floor. In one single blast, icy wind, reverberating lights, and blaring loud-speakers seemed to sweep at him out of the dark cañon of the Petrovka Place as he stood there.

Immediately beneath the window was a gigantic fire-sign which urged the citizens to invest their roubles in the State funds and defeat Russia's enemies. It depicted a Soviet workman handing rouble-notes to a kindly official. It blazed like a bonfire one moment, and went black the next. But the network of its myriad lights stretched down almost to the ground. It might not hold him and he might fall; he might be electrocuted before he had descended far. But, Worden told himself with an odd, exhilarated doggedness, that was preferable to being shot by Vladimir or knifed by his servant. At any rate it would not be defeat. . . .

Yogatai came on to the cornice as he lowered himself into the blinding radiance. Worden began to feel cool now, and in a way savagely glad that Vladimir had not accepted his offer of a truce. About it all, was something of the fantasy of this new insane Russia he had come back to, as he hung there, in a fire-mist one moment, and the next, on a black and burned-out staging of wires and metal framework. Once, under the clutch of his fingers, a garland of bulbs came clinking about him; then one of the giant letters sagged and twisted as he stepped out on it, almost precipitating him to the pavement below. The loud-speakers were barking something, like chained dogs that never varied their cry.

"S.O.S. . . . S.O.S. . . . S.O.S. . . ."

Worden did not look up to see if the Mongol was following him. If he were, the fragile trellis of light, supported only by a crazy scaffolding, would inevitably come piecemeal from the wall. But he was slowly descending, and still it held. Nor was Vladimir trying to pot him with his pistol, for he must be nearly invisible both in the dazzlement of light when he moved, and in the periods of darkness, when he waited. . . .

Still barking, those loud-speakers. While he clung to the vast shoulder of the Soviet workman as the figure handed out interminable roubles of light, he came near to the brazen throat of one of them. For a moment, John Worden listened uncomprehendingly to the words it spoke.

"S.O.S. . . . S.O.S. . . . S.O.S. . . . The calumnies of the Soviet's enemies who say there is no justice in Russia are to be disproved by the Government in the Gunter Case. Gunter, an American, indicted for sabotage and arson, is in custody and will be tried by a full public tribunal. Citizens are assured that foreigners in Moscow, of whatever nationality, will be treated without privilege but with strict justice . . . The Gunter Case . . . With the American Gunter, will be charged the American John Worden, and a Russian woman of half-English parentage, named Elsa Peterson . . . The Government calls upon all citizens who know these two persons to deliver them up for fair public trial by tribunal in the Gunter Case."

Vladimir returned slowly from the window cornice, replacing his pistol as he did so. In some Tartar dialect, he shot a swift word to Yogatai which made the Mongol pad swiftly away. There was a moment of silence when only the flaring rhythm of the fire-signs outside jerked in and out of the room; then Vladimir switched on the electric light. His quick glance sought Elsa. He tried to speak collectedly.

"A turbulent customer, your friend Worden, Elsa," he said, "and slippery, too. Unless he's broken his neck on the pavement, he has got clear. What is that American cinema-actor—Douglas Fairbanks? He has nothing on John Worden, as they say. Did he frighten you?"

Elsa shook her head.

"I'm past being frightened, I think," she answered, "even of you and your servant, Boris. I suppose it's no use asking you what right you had to come into my room?"

"To protect you,"—Vladimir bit his lip,—"and possibly to protect myself, also."

"John Worden wouldn't hurt me. The next time any friend comes to see me, Boris, I'll give you due notice so that you may have a machine-gun placed in position beforehand."

Vladimir flushed at the quiet irony. He was tingling

with the humiliation of Worden's escape—though, he pondered, there was still a chance that Yogatai might get him in the street.

"You're my promised wife."

Elsa looked at him and walked to the window. She was just beginning to realize what it was that John Worden had come for—to tell her that he loved her, and that there was no hope for either of them. It was strange how happy and content it left her.

"I heard him offer you a fair bargain. If you played straight with me, he said, he would leave you alone. But you didn't play straight—with him. You knew he was unarmed."

"Who is he, to bargain?" demanded Vladimir grimly.

HE stood behind Elsa; she felt his breath on her cheek. But this time his nearness gave her no recoil. John Worden had left some kind of armor with her. There might be no hope for either of them—but he loved her, not the Bright Angel. Nor had the Bright Angel been able to destroy him as, Elsa knew dimly, such women could destroy certain men.

The loud-speakers were very busy tonight, under the stars of Moscow, and clearer than usual. They seemed to be playing the same tune over and over again, like diabolical barrel-organs. Elsa felt Vladimir's fingers on her arm suddenly tighten.

"Listen! What do they say? 'S.O.S. . . . Gunter, John Worden, Elsa Peterson.'"

"Dogs tear them!" whispered Vladimir violently.

Elsa listened to the clamoring voices which flung her name and John Worden's all over Moscow. There was something inhuman in that suave, self-satisfied sound, speaking from behind the walls of the Kremlin into the ether. It had a dignity, a hypocritical solemnity, that was quite different from its usual propaganda-bark. It tossed her name gently into the cold air, with John Worden's.

"The calumnies of the Soviet's enemies . . . full public tribunal . . . The Government calls upon all citizens . . ."

"They evidently want me badly. I think it must be what Nick Gunter calls a diplomatic case," remarked Elsa.

She could speak calmly. The scene in the consulate, Nick Gunter in his mangy fur coat, the secretary's obvious panic at the sight of the little man, all flashed before her. It left her drained of everything save a detached curiosity.

Not so Vladimir. He was shaken. He knew that whatever brilliant brain had devised the plan of a public clamor for the full public trial of Nicholas Gunter, John Worden and Elsa Peterson, it was that of somebody far higher placed than Boris Vladimir, People's Commissar.

"You're frightened," said Elsa.

"No, but—this bedlam! They make a hundred clumsy blunders that disgust the rest of the world and then stage some elaborate act to prove they're not as black as they're painted. Like children. They have Gunter. They know where you are, where Worden is. In an instant they could put their hands on you. Yet they howl all over Moscow for you."

"You might take care they didn't get me, Boris."

And Elsa laughed. It lightened her heart to think that Boris Vladimir was a coward.

"If we could get to Tiflis—with you disguised, perhaps."

"I'm rather an expert at disguises, now. Tiflis is only about a thousand miles away, isn't it?"

Vladimir, out of contracted eyes, looked at her. He knew Russian women, but this one baffled him. Russian women always broke after a time, when things bludgeoned them; and even princesses among them—princesses first, perhaps—sought some man for comfort and protection. But Elsa could laugh. Did she see some way of escape when the glare of publicity beat upon her and Worden? A savage gust of jealousy shook Vladimir for a moment.

"We must wait and think out some plan," he said uncertainly. "You will stay here tonight? Promise me!"

"Oh, I promise," returned Elsa.

Boris Vladimir closed the great panes of the window, to shut out the loud-speaker which jarred him. As he went out, Elsa's glance followed him gravely, and for an instant, he felt relieved to be away from her penetrating gaze.

In the house behind the scarlet door, he sat and gnawed his finger-nails. Yogatai, entering, gave him a quick look, showed his yellow teeth in disappointment, and vanished.

A fine perspiration broke out on Vladimir's brow, as he continued to sit alone. The Kremlin wanted her—and when the lion roared, the lesser animals gave up what they had found! Every hour he sheltered Elsa made him more suspect, People's Commissar though he was. The gigantic machine spared nobody. What would they do to Worden, Elsa, and that twenty-times-accursed Gunter? Siberia, or the timber-camps, or—the fools were mad enough when they began their clumsy game of hoodwinking the world—freedom?

Yogatai brought in wine. Outside, the loud-speakers died away and the last droshky tinkled home, leaving the streets to the Black Crows and the bandits. The Asiatic stirred in Boris Vladimir. With two empty bottles before him, the dark eyes, nicked as by a knife in his white face, became more and more like those of Yogatai as they wandered to the curtained door which communicated through the building to the room above, that he had left a few hours before.

BUT Elsa, breaking her promise, had left the building above the house with the scarlet door.

She went out quietly as from a place of great danger, while the crowds yet thronged the streets and the hidden voices on the dark buildings called her name at regular intervals. Probably, Elsa thought, from the moment she stepped out, she was watched and followed; but she felt no terror this time. Blue-bloused electricians stood gapingly before the sign which John Worden had grievously damaged in his descent; there was a gathering of whining beggars—all lopped and crippled in the Terror—at the end of the Bolshaya Dmitrovka, and their cries pursued Elsa.

In her childhood Elsa had played a game she and Martin called, "Can you find me?" among the corridors of the mansion that was now Apartment House 187. Some such game she seemed now to be playing in the dark corridors of Moscow, though she was not trying to hide. She was just waiting to be found . . .

"Little one!" It was a whisper from a kerchiefed woman who drifted by her side in the crowd and tugged at her arm. Glancing up quickly, Elsa saw the fat, satiny face of Maryanka,—Nick Gunter's sweetheart from the old timber-barge *Timofeev 2*,—marked with the dirt-channels of dried tears, but lit with a kind of mournful pride. "I have sought you for hours and hours. Do you hear the Kremlin caterwauling for you? They have my little Nicholas, it seems, and are bent upon a war with America on his behalf. And Nicholas will put his fingers to his nose to all of them. It is terrible! But why do I talk? Come! I know a dark way from here to the *Timofeev* where they will never find you."

Elsa shook her head. She and Maryanka stood at that moment in the darkness outside the walls of the Kremlin. Not a hundred yards away was the tomb of Lenin, with a crimson flag floating upon it, brilliantly illuminated by hidden floodlighting. Save for that bizarre splash of radiance, the lamps were few. A car came past it, and stopped, gently, by the two girls.

Two men stepped out. They smiled and stiffly saluted Elsa; obviously they were Ogpu officers of higher rank than usual.

"Pray honor us, Comrade Elsa Peterson. There is no harm, I assure you. We are only driving to the Opéra, to start with."

Elsa looked at the courteous, steely face. She stepped into the car. Then she was conscious of Maryanka's shrill tones, lifted high in protest.

"Would you leave me behind, I who am the *Amerikanka's* sweetheart? He will exact a terrible revenge, I tell you, if he gets to know of it."

"Let her come."

The car glided forward. There was a kind of ironic gentleness about the two Ogpu officers which became still more manifest when the vehicle stopped before the brightly lighted portals of the Opéra where, nowadays, the half-starved proletariat crowded to forget their empty stomachs in music. At that moment, it was just about time for the curtain to descend.

"Why the Opéra?" asked Elsa steadily, though she was beginning dimly to understand.

"A little charade with a distinguished man," was the answer. "You will see. It will not be unpleasant."

The great staircases which, in bygone days, had been thronged by glittering men and women as arrogant and brutal and sure of themselves as the austere men and women of this new paradise now were, would again be thronged in a minute or two. The curtain had descended, and a hum and clatter of applause came, muffled by the long semicircle of boxes. One of the officers opened a baize door.

"In here, Comrade Elsa."

"And me too!" panted Maryanka, who had clung like a leech to the Ogpu officers all the way.

THE lights of the great auditorium blazed up, as Elsa stepped into the box. She found herself standing there beside a small, shock-headed man whose uniform blazed with Soviet orders. He had come to his feet at her entrance, and clicked his heels, with a smile. Suddenly the band which sat before the lowered curtain, blared out the Internationale, one of the lights in the wings flitted to the box, and shone upon it, turning to gay colors the ribboned breast of Menjinsky of the Gay-pay-oo—for he was the small man in the box. From every tier and from the great pavement of workmen and their women which filled the auditorium below—surely the frowsiest and strangest opera audience in the world!—faces craned and stretched, to gaze up at the box with a buzz of excitement. Then over the great proscenium-arch a loud, disembodied parrot-voice began to talk!

"The Government sends its greeting to comrades at the Opéra and produces proof that it is moving in the matter of the Gunter Case. The woman Elsa Peterson has just been arrested by Menjinsky; the American Gunter is in custody; the American John Worden is expected to surrender any moment . . . . A fair and just public trial . . . the calumnies of the Soviet's enemies—"

"There will be a war with England, too!" moaned Maryanka, shrinking dazedly from the glare.

"Who is this?" asked Menjinsky.

"The American Gunter's sweetheart."

"She will be useful for evidence. All is grist that comes to the mill!" The white-mustached muzzle twitched amusement. "But send her away, now. I congratulate you, Comrade Elsa, upon being on the high road to fame."

He opened the box ceremoniously, while the loud-speakers brayed and the audience, not daring to move while the Internationale was being played, stood sheepishly.

AN adventure, my dear Feodorovna," said John Worden, with a careless grin, "which it has been my ambition to have in every city I've traveled in. I always wanted to clamber up and down a sky-sign, whenever I've walked through Broadway or Piccadilly Circus. It's the eternal boy, plus the moth-and-flame instinct in man."

An amused laugh left Feodora, as she put out long fingers to toy with the stem of her glass.

"I found you rather an elusive moth, Johnny." She frowned. "No, I can't call you that name. You're a difficult man for a woman to own, if it's only because of your name, which is so plain and masterful that I think I'll Russianize it to Ivan. . . . Didn't a big crowd gather to see you alight on the pavement?"

"Not much of one—and I imagine they took it for an obscure propaganda stunt. Besides, the electric bulbs were falling like shells." He drummed the table thoughtfully. "Why, with so much everyday killing in Moscow, is it so hard to get the man you're after, Feodorovna mine?"

"You'll get him, yet!"—her eyes hooded. "—Did you return here immediately? The loud-speakers seem very busy about something."

"They give me a headache. I never listen to their dope. Yes, I came immediately."

She came across the room, and knelt by his chair, craning back her head. Her eyes were running gold between the slits of her lids. She was dressed in red. Blood and gold, thought Worden. And white flesh—over a soul that had never been anything but black.

"I'd give my life to see you crawl to me—hear you sob, like some men in this country, when they're afraid of losing their women."

Worden put one arm about her and pinned her wrists in a single big hand. He swung her into his embrace lightly and lifted her to the couch with her shining head on his shoulder; his face, which she could not see, was smiling granite to any observer. . . . If she carried a knife for that last hour she was to spend with her lover, it was well hidden. . .

"I'd make a ghastly noise if I tried to sob, you Cossack tigress," he said. "As for crawling, haven't I crawled enough?"

"Not nearly. I haven't got your soul."

"Vampire! I thought good Communists didn't believe in souls!"

He left her for a moment to pour out two goblets of wine. Feodora's eyes followed him, and for an instant fear seemed to swim through them, as though some wild doubt of herself came. Both were masked to each other, both fighting some great duel of wits, in the quiet room.

Then she asked softly:

"Do you love me?"

"I love you."

"Say, 'I worship you'."

"I worship you."

"How passionate! I think we should have some coffee."

SHE flitted like quicksilver to the sideboard, leaving her fragrance in Worden's nostrils; only the tinkle of the cups disturbed the silence before Feodora turned.

"Would you like to come with me to Constantinople? The Kremlin thinks of sending me there on some secret mission, and I'm rather tired of being the Bright Angel of Moscow. I don't know what my rôle is—perhaps to be one of the Beautiful Ones and make some Turkish pasha sob and crawl." Her eyes danced mischievously. "Would you be fearfully jealous if it was that, little Ivan?"

"Damnably!" muttered Worden.

His empty cup rolled from its saucer and spilled the dregs of the coffee; he made a gigantic effort to lift a

head that nodded on his chest, to control muscles which were flexed as though by some deadly poison. His hand went out, and with her fingers up to protect her throat, Feodora shrank back—but Worden's arm fell nervelessly, before he could seize her. . . .

"It was not poison," said Feodora. "You thought it was, didn't you?"

She stood in her trim Ogpu uniform, breeched, booted, and with her revolver-lanyard slung over her shoulder. Her cap lay on the table, and she had brushed the clipped, glossy hair close to her head again. A laugh that rang hard left her lips.

"So you never listen to loud-speakers, and you don't know the Council is looking for you in order to give you a public trial with the girl Peterson and the American Gunter? Cunning John!"

The haze that clouded Worden's sight went away a little, leaving him sickish, but clear-witted. He was firmly bound to a low French chair—his ankles tied, his arms well-pinioned. Mechanically he looked round, but there was nobody in the room save Feodora. No sense of treachery came to him. He had been alive to the possibility of anything, even to poison, though he had had to risk that. He had had to risk a lot of things when he came back to Feodora's rooms, that night. . . .

"The Egyptian queen, eh?" he said slowly. "This is a showdown. What are you going to do with me?"

A tremor passed through her. She was very pale yet like white metal. She did not reply to his question, but took her revolver from its holster, and spoke almost somberly.

"We're both fools: You, for thinking you could use me and outwit me—me, for not putting poison instead of a harmless drug in that coffee, and getting it over quickly. I think I could have disposed of your body. It would have been magnificent to put you in a car afterward and drive you to the Kremlin, and tumble you out at the door of Stalin's apartments."

John Worden smiled. If the woman, back in her Ogpu uniform, looked like some pale, golden robot, he matched her in steeliness, bound as he was.

"I like you like this, Feodora, better than I did—before. There was imagination in that. Won't you hit me with your revolver-butt, like a true Ogpu officer?"

She took a sudden savage step forward, but instead of striking him, crushed his lips with hers hotly, till he was stifled, then sprang back. The smoky flame behind her pupils was near to madness.

"That was Feodora saying good-by. She would have saved you, and made you think you had been dead till she came, if you could have forgotten Elsa Peterson. Oh, you couldn't. She knew it all the time, my friend. The Bright Angel of the Ogpu speaks, now."

"Proceed," said John Worden, looking at her from beneath heavy lids. "And thanks for dismissing Feodora, Madame Bright Angel. She was too inhuman for my taste. Like this country of hers."

"I won't shoot before I have finished," she said slowly, shaking her head. "The Bright Angel works to a schedule in these matters, John Worden. Let us imagine that Feodora has handed you to her, instead of to the Government. Do you desire to know the admirable plan I have laid?"

"No," answered Worden.

"I'll tell you,"—with a negligent smile that did not hide the viper behind it. "It may please you to learn that the Mongol Yogatai will be punished for your death. *I* couldn't afford to take the risk—because Stalin himself is in this. The Kremlin wants you alive for a stunt, a spoof, whatever you call it. But Feodora doesn't. Do you see the clock? In fifteen minutes, Yogatai will come here with a key I've given him—and get an unpleasant surprise to find you already dead. A further unpleasant surprise awaits him when I enter with two of my officers and arrest him for murder."

"Splendid, Feodora," said John Worden. "You don't mind me calling you by that name? It's rather confusing."

The Bright Angel struck him with the butt of his revolver, and he smiled through the trickle of blood which ran over his eyebrow.

"That, I imagine," he said, "was the Bright Angel. When you shoot, madame, won't the neighbors come before there is a chance to fasten it on Yogatai?"

"Cold as an iceberg!" said Feodora with a shudder. "And in Antibes, where I first loved you, I was tempted to give up my country, my faith, for you—if you had asked me! Even here in Russia I might have done it, if I couldn't convert you. But you used me—*me*, Feodora!"

The Bright Angel raised her revolver and pulled the trigger. The smoke and crash of the explosion filled the hot room. John Worden's head fell lifelessly on his chest.

The Bright Angel threw her weapon to the carpet in order to hide her ashen face in her hands. Those people in Moscow who averred that Madame Feodora was part werewolf would have seen that the other part of her, at least, was woman. There was no sound in the room, save the gentle tick of the clock, and a furtive stir, somewhere deep in the building, which died away. Somebody had caught the crack of the revolver, muffled as it was in the draperies of the room, but deemed discretion the better part of valor.

There was the flash of bayonets. "Gay-pay-oo, Comrade Number 938," he announced.

Presently the woman stirred. There was brandy on the sideboard. Feodora Federoff had looked detachedly at many dead men, but she did not dare to look at John Worden for a minute or two. Then, putting down the glass she had drained, even supporting herself a little by the sideboard, she looked around.

A scream rose to her lips, and froze there. She reeled, plucked the revolver from her holster, fired again twice at the powerful figure which came slowly across the room to her. The Bright Angel, whose very name was a terror, herself drank deep of it for one blind second.

"No use, Feodora," said John Worden, lifting her gently, yet with herculean strength. He looked quietly into the wide eyes, his cheek against hers, utterly detached, utterly unemotional, as he slipped about her the bonds which had held him.

"Quiet, woman!" He spoke icily as she made some sound. "I changed the cartridges for blanks when you went out an hour ago. There were a few other precautions I took, but that, as it happens, was the important one. I'm alive enough, if that's what is troubling you. The trick has been done before. I'm fastening you a little more tightly than you did me, but you'll be comfortable enough. The Mongol will set you free when he comes."

He looked at her, his arms hanging, the clot of blood at his temple giving a touch of the sinister to his tight-lipped face. There was no triumph in it, but only a faint weariness and pallor, as without another glance, he passed out.

Feodora the Bright Angel, whose very name was a terror, herself drank deep of it.

John Worden breathed the cold night air deeply into his lungs when he reached the snow-whitened street, but it did not banish the lassitude which a man might feel who escapes, scorched from fire.

He had kept his wits about him that night, fearing Feodora's treachery and meaning to circumvent it. It had not been difficult to put blank cartridges in her revolver, and easy enough to slip his bonds, for a man who had spent a few evenings with the *cercle magique*, that odd gathering of famous conjurers and illusionists which meets sometimes in Montparnasse, sometimes in Brooklyn, sometimes in Hampstead. But he felt tired now—sick of Russia, sick even of his feud against Boris Vladimir and what it had led his soul into.

In the little back street by the Kremlin where Menjinsky's house stood, he paused, then mounted the steps of the doorway.

There was a sudden flash of bayonets, the uneasy stir of watchers, a quick, bright light leveled upon him.

"Gay-pay-oo, Comrade Number 938, of Madame Feodora's department," he announced, smiling grimly at the officer who appeared. "I have the honor to bring John Worden."

IT seemed, both to Elsa and John Worden that they had been in the big, overheated court chamber for the greater part of their lives. On the first day, there had been a warm-smelling herd of the proletariat, obviously mustered to make a public, and very sheepish before the Red Guards and Ogpu troops that lined the room. But the second and third day, these dwindled away. The newspaper-reporters still scribbled, a microphone hung before the Judge, and once or twice a photographer took a flashlight photograph. Koregorvsky, secretary to the Public Prosecutor, sat as though changed into a red-eyed baboon, his inflamed glance scarcely leaving the prisoners for a moment. But the Bright Angel was not there. Nor was Boris Vladimir, People's Commissar.

"You have been found guilty, Nicholas Gunter, of sabotage against the State, inasmuch as you destroyed twenty dynamos at the Litaygorod generating station. Furthermore, it is proved that you set fire to Tenement No. 3627, in which many citizens perished."

"A frame-up, that," said Nick Gunter cheerfully. "I put the Kremlin lights out, but I never burned those Ivans up. But carry on, Judge!"

"You, Elsa Peterson,"—the Judge swiveled a close-cropped head; he was quite young, with light-blue metallic eyes in a suave face,—"are found guilty of being also concerned in the burning of Tenement No. 3627, and other crimes which have been since pardoned. As a Russian citizen, you are an enemy to the State. Since, all along you have been associated with John Worden, a spy.

"John Worden, you came to Russia in disguise, with false papers, and have plotted against the State ever since. You were even audacious enough to join the Government police, the G.P.U. Your own country cannot intervene for a spy. You too are found guilty, and herewith sentenced.

"The sentence in each case is—death!"

A scream rang from a woman who sat in the public seats.

Nick Gunter roared loudly, "Shut up, Maryanka!" and then looked coolly at the Judge. There was something about his bantamlike figure, still clad in its molting fur coat, which would have detracted from the dignity of something much more impressive than the solemn farce which was being enacted.

"Aw, keep going, Judge," he adjured. "You've not finished yet."

Koregorvsky rapped the desk before him. He sprang to his feet with his shriveled animal's face lean and hungry.

"Silence, dog!" he shrilled. "Sentence is passed!"

"Comrade Koregorvsky," said the Judge with a saturnine glance at the little secretary, "is a zealous servant of the State. But he must not interrupt justice. The sentence is death; it is richly deserved. But there are enemies of the Soviet all over the world, who accuse us of savagery and bloodthirstiness. The Council of Commissars instruct me to make a generous gesture, out of friendship for America, the Russia of the West. It will include the other two prisoners. The sentence is commuted. The Gunter Case is finished. The prisoners are pardoned and set free."

The Judge gathered up his black robes and came to his feet with a movement that had its touch of pomposity. A photographer's flashlight-powder flared for an instant. Elsa felt John Worden's hand fall upon her own.

"Did you hear, Elsa? The mummery's over."

Elsa touched her forehead involuntarily. There had been hours while the witnesses for the prosecution had passed in long procession, when she had nearly slept. They had ranged from a Soviet registrar who had proved her aristocratic origin, to Drishkin the governor of the Butyrka. Now it was all over, she felt a strange reaction and a disbelief in it all.

"Are we free—to leave Russia?"

"God knows. I don't like this cat-and-mousing. We're in bigger hands than the Ogpu, at the moment. They've blown their brass trumpets, but—"

He went no further, for Nick Gunter had seized their hands and was pumping them, his red Indian face crimson with triumph.

"Told you," he said jerkily. "American citizen. They gotta let us go if they don't want their Five-Year Plan go bust. Glad to have saved you from the Bolshie bloodwallowers, partners. Now I'll go give Maryanka a smack on the back."

HE was calmly scaling the rails of the big dock which enclosed them, when one of the Ogpu officers pulled him back with a friendly grin.

"There is a better way out below, comrade," he said, "and you wouldn't go without your card of release?"

"Like a bloomin' soup-kitchen, for tickets, this country!" said Nick Gunter, slightly dashed. "Lead on, Comrade Greenjacket."

Elsa's hand sought John Worden's, and he held it tightly as they went down together behind the triumphant back of the little Texan. Beneath the courtroom of the Lubianka, where the trial had taken place, was a warren of cold but brightly lighted stone corridors, and a low, broad chamber furnished as an office. Menjinsky of the Ogpu sat there, spurred and booted. He looked up satirically, pushing something across the table.

"Your cards of release, comrades. I offer my congratulations."

"I also," said the unusually smooth voice of Koregorvsky. "There is justice and mercy, after all, in Russia, Comrade Mitka Ivanovitch, as you see. By the way, Madame Feodora, who was prevented from being present at the trial, asked me to convey her kind regards. And to you, Comrade Elsa, Citizen Vladimir did likewise, though like myself he has now forsworn the other sex, I understand—in Moscow, at least. He leaves for Tiflis quite soon."

Koregorvsky ducked a little bow.

"Mr. Gunter," he said, "I congratulate you upon your name ringing all round the world. The way out lies straight down the corridor."

It was Nick Gunter who led the way, swaggering in his fur coat as he went, like a man who trod upon Bolshies. Elsa, following with her fingers tightly locked in Worden's, could not keep away a dryness which came to her mouth for no apparent reason. This corridor seemed so long and ill-lighted. She was only nervous, she told herself—but the place was terribly like the cellars of the Butyrka, the thick pillars like those round which the hand of the executioner stole when condemned prisoners went to exercise. . . .

"I don't like it!" she whispered.

NOR did Worden. An almost irresistible impulse to return and shake Koregorvsky by the throat for some vague treachery came to him. But he said, through his teeth:

"Courage, Elsa! It's all right."

Nick Gunter's voice sang out: "Gee, it's a long lane that has no turning, isn't it?"

They saw the revolver-butt drop upon his gayly poised head, saw him lurch forward on his face. Blackness dropped with a dull explosion upon each of them almost at the same second of time. . . .

An eternity later, or so it seemed, John Worden awakened from a long night of sick and painful dreams. He lay in a steadily jolting dimness which was saved from complete darkness only by a hurricane lamp that swayed overhead.

In his nostrils lingered the fetid smell of many human beings which he had grown to recognize since his return to Russia. Though the waves of nausea went through him again as he moved, he sat up.

It was a railway cattle-wagon. Huddled and sprawled in every posture of sleep and despair were, perhaps, fifty men and women. The springless vehicle shook them like dead bodies as it went on its way. There was something Dantesque about the complete human silence of everything. But presently something stirred near Worden. An old man's face, with a tangled imperial beard and dull, short-sighted eyes peered at him.

"So you are awake, friend?"

"Siberia?" Worden spoke the one word.

"The timber-camps. God knows where. We left Moscow an hour ago. They threw you in like pigs."

Something clanked faintly as Worden moved his hand. He looked down and saw it was a heavy chain which manacled him to two other persons—Elsa Peterson and Nick Gunter, of the Gunter Case.

The climax of this extraordinary novel of adventure in Soviet Russia is dramatic in the extreme. Be sure to read it—in the next, the July, issue.

Domestic Cases Confidential

Wherein a saddle-colored Sherlock Holmes is shot in error and both legs while his stove-hued Dr. Watson escapes a one-man depression.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

ARMED with an air-rifle, Columbus Collins, dusky head of the detective agency of that name, was hanging around the entrance to the darkened space beneath the old Demopolis freight-depot like a cat around a canary's cage. Ever and anon he loosed a stinging shot at random into the darkness there—until a sudden anguished, *"I's comin' out! I's comin' out!"* indicated results.

"Dawggone right you's comin' out!" snapped Columbus. "Whut you doin' under dat depot, nohow—right when you's fixin' to git a case?"

The two left shoes of Assistant Sleuth Bugwine Breck became visible first as their undersized owner backed painfully from his retreat.

"Geranium!" summarized Mr. Breck sadly and comprehensively.

"Aint I tell you look out for trouble, when you marries dat gal, runt?"

"It aint whut you told *me*—it's whut somebody done told *Geranium* dat's got me sleepin' under de depot."

"Told Geranium whut?"

"Dat I been gwine about wid another woman." The five-foot Bugwine rubbed ruefully the spot where the last BB shot had registered.

Columbus seemed suddenly disposed to ditch gossip for business, just here.

"Payin' *you* wages," he took a new tack, "is jest de same as buyin' more red ink to keep de agency's books wid."

"Whut I gum up now?" The fully emerged assistant stood uneasily before his chief—and possible developments.

"De agency's future, dat whut! I done run into a whole mess of sales-resistance on account of you."

"*'Sales-resistance?'*" Bugwine struggled with a couple of new big words.

"From Bees'-Knees Thompson. I been tryin' to git us de contract of protectin' he barbecue-stand—"

"Dat huccome you lose all de seat out dem blue pants?" Mr. Breck eyed a new patch among Columbus' depression-born plenitude of patches.

"Dawg bit it out—now shet up! Is us git de contract, meals is included, and us eats durin' de depression. But *you*—you gum me up befo' I starts, bein' so dumb!"

Bugwine tried to look smart, but heredity, environment, and the place where the mule had stepped through his straw hat were against him.

"Whut Bees'-Knees balkin' about?" he sought light.

"Say for me not to come round solicitin' he business no more twel I can show him whar us is pulled off a big suc-cess somewhars, instead of all dat list of times you is been half-witted on de hoof."

"Needs us a new case for demonstratin' pu'poses, dat's a fact," admitted Mr. Breck.

"—And whut I been tryin' to tell you ever since I opens fire on you is, us is *got* a new case—"

Interruptingly from an adjacent alley just here reverberated a detonation reminiscent of Big Bertha before Paris, followed by sounds of a hail of shot, gravel, and carpet-tacks tearing through some metallic surface. The overstrung Bugwine dived involuntarily for his former haven—until another BB shot recalled him.

"Stay here!" barked Columbus. "Dat aint nothin' but Ducktooth Carnes wid dat old muzzle-loader! And is you got a wife as good-lookin' as dat Emma of his'n—she's *some* looker, boy!—you'd better be in de alley target-practisin' on lard-cans, too!"

Mr. Breck's eyes revolved in opposite directions. Everybody knew of the jealous nature and sudden trigger-finger of Mr. Carnes.

"Emma's one good-lookin' gal; dat huccome you got to watch yo' step wid Ducktooth," continued Mr. Collins pointedly.

"Geranium brung me down wid a skillet *widout* no practisin'," recalled Bugwine aggrievedly. "—And quit shootin' me in de pants!"

"Aint no other way to git no sense into you. Make haste now; assignment's waitin'."

"Huccome *assignment?*"—dubiously. Columbus always took the good cases himself.

"Lemme see dat new business card de agency gits print' for you."

Mr. Breck fished in a hip pocket, brought out a flat package, unfurled two yards of wrapping-paper, and at its core finally came to a soiled card, which Columbus snatched. "See dat at de bottom?" he pointed.

"Old air-gun make dat dent in de card!" Bugwine missed the point.

"Aint talkin' 'bout no dent: talkin' about de printin' whut say here, *'Domestic Cases Confidential.'* Dat huccome you gits dis new case us is gwine handle. Make good on it, and us guards Bees'-Knees' stand, and eats. Elsewise—"

Bugwine looked at the alternative; then he looked under the depot—yearningly.

"Dumb as you is," continued Mr. Collins, "de agency

gives you one more chance befo' axin' for yo' resig-nation, wid a baseball bat."

Mr. Breck dragged his tin star farther to the front on his overalls, and waited.

"Gum *dis* up, and dey sprinkles lilies on yo' vest," predicted the agency-head confidently. "Beca'ze you is fixin' to be de co-respondent in a divo'cement case!"

Flattered flutterings of Mr. Breck's eyelids indicated that he had not read that far in the dictionary. "Co-*who?*" he put ignorance into words.

"Co-respondent."

"Gwine be a divo'cement, huh?" Mr. Breck fought for light and air.

"Naw, aint gwine be no *divo'cement:* but *you* gwine be a co-respondent. Dat whar de 'Domestic Cases Confidential' part comes in. Keeps down de scandal, but does de work. When us finishes wid it, us can show Bees'-Knees den de big suc-cess it takes to sell him. I wuz de one whut scum up de scheme—"

Bugwine fingered the hoof-hole in his hat. When Columbus schemed, aides suffered!

"Ducktooth jest aimin' to teach he wife Emma a lesson," elaborated Mr. Collins. "My scheme is for him to cotch you makin' talk wid her; den Ducktooth shoots de co-respondent, and—"

Mr. Breck was two blocks up the alley, and well into the third, before his superior was able to overtake him.

"Stay around and hear de rest!" The agency-head collared him wrathfully.

"Done heard plenty!"

"Think of de future—"

"I is! Dat's huccome I's travelin' now!"

"Old scheme'll show Bees'-Knees whut a swell de-tective *I* is—"

"And show eve'ybody whut a good cawpse I is! Besides, I got myself reasons—"

"You aint got nothin'—'cep'n concrete between both dem lop-ears!"

"Is, too! Beca'ze whoever tell Geranium I's steppin' out, done say it's Emma I's steppin' *wid!* Let Ducktooth hear dat—and den find me wid Emma—and *he aint miss!*"

"Maybe Ducktooth aint hear!"

"Wid Geranium hollerin' all over de Hill?"

"Risk you runs when you gits to gwine about wid Emma—"

"Tells you I *aint* been gwine about wid her! Some low-down pup frame me to smoke-screen hisself—"

Mr. Breck thought of something else that was wrong with Columbus' scheme—and blanched six shades lighter as he voiced it: "Is Geranium hear of me even gittin' shot *at* while I's hangin' round Emma, aint do *me* no good is Ducktooth miss me!"

"Boy, I's been tryin' tell you, you jest gits shot in your professional capacity—"

"Aint matter whar I gits shot—mess me up jest de same wid Geranium!"

"Rest of de instruction is, keep your mouth shet," Columbus ignored him. "It b'ils down to dis: be de co-respondent, and maybe Ducktooth miss you; git bull-headed about it, and aint no *maybe* to it—you starves sure, widout dat Bees'-Knees contract us is after. Besides," —Mr. Collins' voice broke pathetically,—"you aint got no gratitude: here I sets up nights schemin' out a way for you to eat regular—and instead of coöperatin', you tries to run out on me!"

"Co-responds wid Emma," weakened Mr. Breck before the high plane upon which Columbus had put his being shot, "—but props dat back door open *pussonal.* —And, boy, dat dawg sho is chaw hisself a mouthful out dem blue pants of yourn! Old patch gittin' bigger'n de pants!"

FOLLOWING this fateful decision, Bugwine's route became like a State highway—largely detours. But he did not detour enough—not by one vital omission. Rounding a corner into Hogan's Alley, it was suddenly too late to run. Fowling-piece in hand, Ducktooth Carnes, husband of Emma, blocked his way.

Mr. Carnes' expression was what would be expected of a middle-aged dyspeptic whose wife was not only young and easy to look at, but lonely and light-minded.

"Er—Bugwine,"—Ducktooth brought his weapon to "right shoulder," and Mr. Breck's heart to a halt,—"is you still in de de-tectin' business?"

Glimmered for Bugwine a brief, if false, dawn. The husband was reputed always to be the last to hear of these domestic matters. "So fur," he risked it. "'Smells 'em out whar others jest sniffs about.'"

Mr. Carnes shifted his gun, and Mr. Breck shifted his feet while re-swallowing his heart.

"Is you reckon," essayed Ducktooth, "you could keep a case confidential?"

Bugwine unrolled two yards of wrapping-paper, and proved it by his business-card.

"Figures I cain't be too keerful—" elaborated Mr. Carnes.

"Sho cain't!" Bugwine agreed with all gun-bearers.

"I re-tains Columbus to find out for me who been steppin' out wid my wife," continued Mr. Carnes, "but Columbus de sort of boy whut'll double-cross you, is you aint keep a check on him—"

"Dat Columbus so crooked he'd forge his own name to a check!"

It was suddenly too late to run. Fowling-piece in hand, Ducktooth Carnes blocked his way.

"—So I wants you to keep your eyes open and your mouth shet—not tell Columbus nothin' about *me* hirin' *you* now, to keep your eye on Emma too. Find out who de co-respondent is. I shoots de wrong boy once, and de doctors sho is had a tough time correctin' de error."

The call of distance rose to a scream in Bugwine's alarmed ears.

"—And don't let me cotch *you* round my place, neither!" concluded Mr. Carnes.

"Aint *see* Emma in a year! Aint even know her! Somebody all de time gittin' up a mess of lies," interpolated Mr. Breck, before he hurriedly recalled that there might be such a thing as overdoing his defense.

But a moment later, midway between his newest private client and Hogan's Alley, Bugwine leaped into the air as though he had been shot—an action followed by the utterance of startled and startling sounds indicative of the devastating arrival of a great light. Too late, it appeared, had come cognizance that he had gummed up his business in a fresh place—signed himself up as both co-respondent and detective on conflicting sides of the same case!

A man about to be hanged often fails to take proper precautions about sitting in drafts. Bugwine Breck grew similarly careless, until a shadow and a hand fell upon his affairs—and neck.

"Detectin', aint you!" followed the rude irony of Geranium Breck, *nee* Snews.

"Uh-huh," gurgled her stunted lord uncertainly: give Geranium the wrong answer, and you heard birds singing in the dark. Marrying a girl sure made her mean!

"You and dat lunch-hound Columbus Collins! Aint neither one of you doin' de other no good—and powerful little of dat!"

"Columbus git me on a case," defended Mr. Breck weakly. "Fixin' to fotch you home some barbecue, soon as us makes good and Bees'-Knees signs de contract—"

"Is I aint eat twel you two makes good, hangs a *For Rent* sign on my teeth and sends my stomach to de country! Besides, I jest been round to yo' joint, and Columbus aint dar— *Mumbles which?*"

"Mumbles nothin'—copious."

"Mumble whut sound like *'must've seed you comin'*' again, and I knots your neck twel you cain't swaller! Whut dis I keeps hearin' about you and dat Emma gal?"

"Aint never know no Emma. Done forgot her besides."

"Yeah? Well, jest in case yo' memory gits to workin' again, lemme hear no more about you makin' eyes at no married woman but me, and I hangs a bed-slat across your knob so hard you spits splinters for a week!"

"Aint seen no Emma." It was Bugwine's story, and he was going to stick to it until he got beyond the twelve-mile limit.

But in his new capacity of spotter for Ducktooth, the suspicious husband, it was part of Bugwine's job to see Emma—while in his private capacity as Geranium's husband he needed distance from her. Yet in his third capacity, as co-respondent in the scheme of Columbus for proving Mr. Collins a great detective and the Collins agency therefore worthy of the Bees'-Knees contract, it was necessary for Bugwine to do what his health and other capacities forbade! Success in one capacity practically insured his getting shot in another . . .

"Bugwine Breck, de Human Blood-hound!" exulted the little sleuth to himself as he wormed himself through.

Out of the fog that followed emerged one heartening fact: You couldn't shoot a boy just for shuffling up an alley. Not unless you were married to him, or to a lady who lived in that alley. At the moment, Ducktooth was elsewhere on the Hill, and Geranium had steamed on toward a dish of collards and gossip with a crony. These facts and conclusions led to a fresh complication in the five-foot Mr. Breck's tangled affairs when, just opposite the house of Carnes, low murmurings, admiring giggles, and the gentle creak of a porch-swing behind its vines coming to his ears furnished his first clue—indicated that some other boy was where Bugwine had been blamed for being.

The bloodhound blood in Mr. Breck stirred sharply! Luck loomed. If he could creep up to the porch, determine the identity of the Lothario in the swing, and get word of it to Ducktooth, his success as a sleuth would be both actual and demonstrable, with personal glory and signing of the meals-included contract with Bees'-Knees bound to follow! Not to speak of all necessity being avoided for Bugwine appearing as a combination co-respondent and target in the painfully near future! In brief, Mr. Breck

smelled out the *real* co-respondent where Columbus merely sniffed about and framed up one! This fixed everything! . . .

"Hot dawg! Bugwine Breck, de Human Bloodhound!" exulted the little sleuth to himself as—with one wary eye out for Ducktooth's misanthropic dog—he wormed himself through the Carnes' fence. "Rallies myself copious round de clues! Aims to—"

The interrupting impact of a fence-paling spoke to Bugwine at one end before his ears took up the bad news at the other.

"Uh-huh!" *Whack!* "Jest like I 'lowed!" The voice of the jealous Geranium punctuated the rise and fall of the paling. "Aint more'n turn my back—" *whack!* "—when you's cropin' through de fence to see dat Emma again!" *Whack!*

Through the shrubbery about the porch, in advance of an oncoming audience, instantly shot a one-man flight, over the back fence—some party unknown displaying both speed and judgment, with a bench-legged little sleuth not far behind as a blur of left shoes fled up the mathematical center of Hogan's Alley, while a triumphant Geranium stood arms akimbo in it, and issued to a delighted gallery more opinions than a Supreme Court.

After the manner of an overdue rabbit entering its burrow, Mr. Breck dashed into the Collins Detective Agency, where Columbus was seated with his hat on his head.

"*Now* whar is you been sawin' off de limb between yo'self and de tree?" snapped Mr. Collins shortly.

"Mess up my business when Geranium cotch me climbin' through Emma's fence."

"Good-looker like Emma aint got no time for you nohow, I keeps tellin' you!"

Bugwine rubbed a previously over-exposed area, and remembered that he couldn't afford to let even himself —let alone Columbus—know too much about the different angles of his professional affairs.

"Got you'se'f fixed so you *cain't* lose," commented Mr. Collins on the same things Bugwine was thinking about.

"Maybe cain't lose, but sho can git shot—"

"Dar you go! So shawt you's shawt-sighted! Why, s'pose you *is* git shot—look at whut de Sons of Africa, Asia, and America puts on for you! Band up front. Band in de back. You ridin' right up amongst de 'Big Bugs' in yo' black suit. Eve'ybody all along de sidewalk axin', 'Who dat gwine by?' And eve'ybody sayin' *'Shhh!* Dat Bugwine Breck, de big co-respondent—'"

"Uh-huh—and whut good dat do me when somebody else ax, 'Whut he die of?'"

Pain overspread Mr. Collins' face at this fresh serpent's-tooth of ingratitude. "Tells you," he stormed, "maybe Ducktooth miss you!"

"He aint miss nobody else!"

"But *you* gwine miss somep'n—you gwine miss de rest of your meals, is you aint coöperate to show Bees'-Knees whut a powerful detective *I* is, so us can sign him up," Columbus got the discussion back on a business basis.

Bugwine sighed, and sensed he had lost another argument.

"Onliest thing I's skeered of, you'll gum up somep'n yit," grumbled Mr. Collins as he eyed his helper distastefully. "Is dey a chance to git nothin' wrong, you'll *git* it wrong!"

"Whar at de co-respondin'?" surrendered Mr. Breck sullenly.

"At Ducktooth's house, of co'se! You shuffles in, elegant, in at de front door. Says 'Howdy!' to Emma, den kind of looks lovin' out of dem frawg eyes of yourn at her, and drapes yo' arm round her waist. Right den is whar I opens de door, quick, for Ducktooth—and dar you is!"

"Whut dis I keeps hearin' about you and dat Emma gal?"

"Dar I *wuz*, you means," corrected Mr. Breck.

"All right, make it 'wuz'—outrun de scrap-iron. Den, when de smoke sort of cl'ar away, I points out to Ducktooth dat de Collins Agency always gits its man: done smoked out de co-respondent—dat's you—and solved de mystery. Aint nothin' left to do but for him to take Emma back, gradual, and me to notify Bees'-Knees of how de agency done succeeded—"

"—And me to pick all dem tacks and gravel out de back of my pants! Why aint you smoke out de *real* co-respondent, instead of me?"

"Shet up! Never is see a boy got to be told so often about how it he'p him in a business way to git shot in he professional capacity."

"Hurt dar jest as bad as in de laig!"

"Way to handle you, is not to pay no 'tention to your mouth," his chief ran over him verbally. "Ducktooth r'arin' for re-sults, and thinks I cain't deliver 'em. But I shows him—he aint got long to wait now!"

Mr. Breck quivered and grayed about the gills. If Ducktooth didn't have long to wait, neither did he! Cold drops beaded the Bugwinian brow, in sympathy with the twin chills that were his feet. Low enough spiritually to walk under a turtle, Mr. Breck turned toward Bees'-Knees' establishment; which made it no time for Ducktooth Carnes to reappear forbiddingly upon his horizon.

"Done found me a clue round de place," panted Mr. Carnes disconcertingly.

Bugwine wondered if Geranium's paling had dislodged anything incriminating from his person, and waited.

"Jest needs little cor-roborate," labored Ducktooth, "and

I's got it. 'Dat whar you comes in; cor-roborate de clue —and de shootin' starts!"

Mr. Breck winced. Whatever this corroboration was, he was just low enough in his luck to do it! Boy in his fix could corroborate a clue with his corroborator tied behind him.

"Fixin' to confer about yo' case now," dissembled Bugwine hastily.

"Confer is right!" Ducktooth looked grim. "Clues is like fixin' a clock: put de pieces together right, and you's got it."

"Sho is!" agreed Mr. Breck in haste, as he took his departure.

Yet upon his arrival, breathing hoarsely, at the barbecue-stand of Mr. Thompson the situation could not be called improved. Columbus was just losing a flank-attack for the agency there.

"—Tells you I aint in'sted!" Bees'-Knees was delivering himself. "You boys is done made a flop out of ev'ything you tackles. So I aint sign nothin' twel I sees you make *one* big suc-cess first."

Mr. Collins' famished and clouded eye fell just here upon his newly arrived assistant—fell in cold disfavor upon his patched overalls, his two left shoes, his ratty straw hat with the hoof-hole in its crown, and: "Bugwine!" disgust lifted his voice an octave. "You is done heard de man! Forward to yo' re-hearsal!"

"Whut you mean, 're-hearsal?'" demanded Mr. Breck dubiously, once they were outside.

"Means when dey gits as dumb as you is, cain't trust 'em even to salt dey own pork-chop widout tryin' it over befo'hand wid de salt-shaker. I done wore out eve'ything but de patches on my pants tryin' to make somep'n out of you, and *still* you's dumb!"

"Sho is big patch!" Bugwine eyed the newest one estimatingly.

"Re-hearses first; den you p'fawms—"

Bugwine started to bolt, but Mr. Collins, having foreseen flight, forestalled it expertly. Mentioning a scheme to Mr. Breck these days was like exploding fire-crackers under a horse; he was all the time galloping off if his chief didn't tie him while he told him.

"NOW, rally dem brains," admonished Columbus further, as they neared the Carnes' residence. "I done scum it all out. First off, git de signals right in yo' head."

"Huccome *signals?*"

"Means Ducktooth s'posed to be at de lodge after supper tonight—but he aint. You prances yo'self into his house—"

"S'pose Geranium lookin'?"

"Dat *yo'* business."

"Liable be Sim Silver de undertakin' boy's business, is—"

"Shet up! Cain't hear nothin' wid your mouth looped back over your ears all time dat way! Emma keeps de winder-shades pull' down in de front room after dark—"

"Huccome you know so good whut Emma do? Why aint you *cotch* de co-respondent, instead of framin' one?" Bugwine was getting high-keyed in his anxiety, as personal cataclysms impended.

"*Somebody* in de agency got to know somep'n. Besides, it's quicker to create de crook dan to cotch him—like de agency sign say. Now, listen: You comes prancin' in, says 'Howdy, Miss Emma!' and stands alongside, lookin' up lovin' at her. Den I signals Ducktooth in de bushes—"

"How you gwine signal nobody in de bushes, wid de shades down?"

"*Dat's* de signal—when I raises de shade right sudden. Den Ducktooth grabs and gallops—"

"Grabs whut?"

"Old muzzle-loader of his'n. Comes gallopin' to spray you wid scrap-iron. But you says you aint dar—"

"Just passin' New Awleans!" forecast Mr. Breck firmly.

"—And dat way Ducktooth skeer de foolishment out of Emma; and us eats regular at Bees'-Knees on de new contract de new big suc-cess gits us. —Here de place now."

Bugwine paled anew at the memory of Geranium and the paling.

"Shows you de lay of de land," continued Mr. Collins. "Dar's de window whar de shade gits raised. Dar de—"

"Done scrutinize' de shade. Craves to know whar at de back door. Whar at de prop for it? How fur to de alley—"

"'Tend to all dat when you comes back here tonight. Gum up nothin' now, and you is done ruint yourself."

"Ruint now," mumbled Mr. Breck despairingly, "is Geranium hear about none of it!"

"Locks you up in de agency twel night," his chief completed the filling of his cup of woe. "'Ca'ze you is de kind of boy whut would walk out on a funeral and disapp'int eve'ybody, wuz you de cawpse!"

THROUGH the darkness of Hogan's Alley, under air-rifle-armed escort, shuffled a one-man depression.

"A boy whut would duck out on a chance like dis to boost de agency's so lowdown he got to reach up to touch bottom," quarreled the lanky escort as he prodded the sacrificial Bugwine forward with the gun.

"S-sho is hate to git myself spray' wid all dat scrap-iron, pinch-hittin' for a crook whut you's too dawggone lazy to sniff out!" mourned the pseudo co-respondent, from nearer the sidewalk.

"Maybe he miss you, I keeps hollerin' at you."

"*Geranium* aint, is he is. Besides—" Something stopped Mr. Breck in time: spilling the beans to Columbus about being a spotter for Ducktooth on the side was no way to improve a situation that had already become a predicament.

"Here de Carnes' place now," announced Mr. Collins. "Play safe wid dat dawg, too."

The castanets Bugwine was using for teeth lent a gay sound to the gloom. . . .

Then, hidden, they saw the door open, saw the squat form of Mr. Carnes, fowling-piece in hand, pause there, while they heard: "Gwine git on to de lodge now, gal. Don't set up for me—and don't let nobody in, beca'ze I's gwine be late gittin' back."

Behind the loudly departing Ducktooth, front shades were drawn, a die cast—

"*Now!* And don't gum up nothin'—or let Emma know you's jest re-hearsin' de first time. Make it real!" stage-managed Mr. Collins, propelling Mr. Breck toward his destiny.

"Come *in,* Mist' Collins! Sho is stultifyin' to see you so quick after Ducktooth leave!" There was no mistaking Emma's welcome to greatness. Then, as her eye fell on a darker object close to the floor— "What dat you brang wid you?" she added.

"Bugwine Breck, de Sheik of Frawg Bottom!" declaimed Mr. Collins sonorously.

"Aw, Mist' Collins! Is he no sheikier dan you is, I got to hire somebody to help me stand it!" giggled Emma coyly.

"Bugwine been shot at by half de husbands in de county. Got more buckshots in him dan a bass-singin' tawm-cat," further endorsed Mr. Collins, while making discreet motions at the shaking sheik, behind her flattered back, to begin rehearsing.

As in a daze, the over-endorsed Bugwine attempted to follow instructions, until:

"Craves time out, back in de kitchen, Miss Emma, for little conf'rence," petitioned Mr. Collins darkly. "Mist' Breck git drap on he head when he wuz little, and he aint yit come to, good."

But, once in a professional huddle in the kitchen, Columbus wasted no time on amenities. "You makes love like a store-winder dummy wid de pip!" he exploded savagely. "Git sheiky now! Look lovin' and act lovin'er! Give Ducktooth his powder's worth! Now, git on back in dar and rehearse like you meant it. Den, when you do right, I signals Ducktooth."

The deafening roar of both barrels. . . . the crash of glass that accompanied the dive of Co-respondent Breck through a closed window.

"Brains done skeered off!" wailed Mr. Breck groggily. "All my strength done gone to my laigs, whar I's fixin' to need it. *You* go on in dar, Columbus, and rehearse first."

Then they were back in the front room, with a slightly puzzled Emma. "Y'all gent'mens sho is funny, way you acts!" she rallied them.

"Good-lookin' gal like you always is dizzify me!" returned Mr. Collins gallantly as he sidled toward her.

Mr. Breck fiddled with the edge of the drawn window-shade, and listened tensely for Geranium.

"Waist like yourn jest wasted on shawt-armed boy like Bugwine," Columbus went on with his rehearsal.

At this juncture, a tire on a flivver outside blew out. Convulsively—fatally—Bugwine clutched the shade, then involuntarily released it—only to have it whir suddenly and revealingly upward!

Almost simultaneously it developed that Mr. Carnes had not gone to lodge! For with the encircling arm of the rehearsing Columbus still about the waist of the startled Emma, there was the sound of feet on the porch, of a hand on the door-knob. Then the deafening roar of both barrels at short-range—and the mighty crash of glass that accompanied the dive of Co-respondent Breck through a closed front window!

"So it's *you,* is it!" howled an amazed and berserk Ducktooth, still staggering from the effects of his gun's recoil.

Through the air floated fragments of fabric amid the battle-smoke. Over all rang a new clamor, emanating from a squalling, speeding blur that shot yowling through the kitchen, through the back door, through shrubbery and a panel of unseen fence, before taking uproariously to the alley—splitting the darkness and adjacent eardrums with anguished announcement of a miscarriage of justice and the contents of two gun-barrels! Announcement, in brief, that Columbus, the detective—and not Bugwine, the co-respondent—had been shot in error and in both legs! A clamor that told even more to an equally speeding co-respondent, cleaving the night toward his regular refuge under the freight-depot.

"Lawd, hold my wind even wid my hind-laigs!" prayed the despairing Bugwine. "Old shade done ruin me!"

Then the loom of sanctuary, a last anguished spurt, and Bugwine was under—alone with the darkness of the night!

Timidly, two days later, a once-great *Watson*—with one eye warily open for an outraged *Sherlock*—thrust a famished nose through the doorway of the barbecue-stand.

"Well, dawggone! Dar Bugwine Breck, de great detective!" exclaimed Bees'-Knees with surprising warmth.

Then, between the entering Bugwine and the only door, a clatter of small arms—and Ducktooth blocked his way! Mr. Breck hesitated in agony—until, unbelievably: "Well, if here aint old Bugwine Breck, de great de-tective!" rumbled Ducktooth. "Yessuh, Bees'-Knees," persisted this amazing geniality of Ducktooth, "is you crave no detectin' done, git Bugwine here to do it! *'Domestic Cases Confidential'*—dat's Bugwine to a gnat's knee-cap!"

Mr. Breck gaped anew at Bees'-Knees' answer: "Fact is, I jest been waitin' for Bugwine to come in so I could sign up wid him, after de big suc-cess he is jest made. Columbus propositioned me 'bout it—but look like he aint be back no time soon—"

"Not after dis!" Mr. Carnes, in turn, was fumbling in a pocket; fishing forth something—

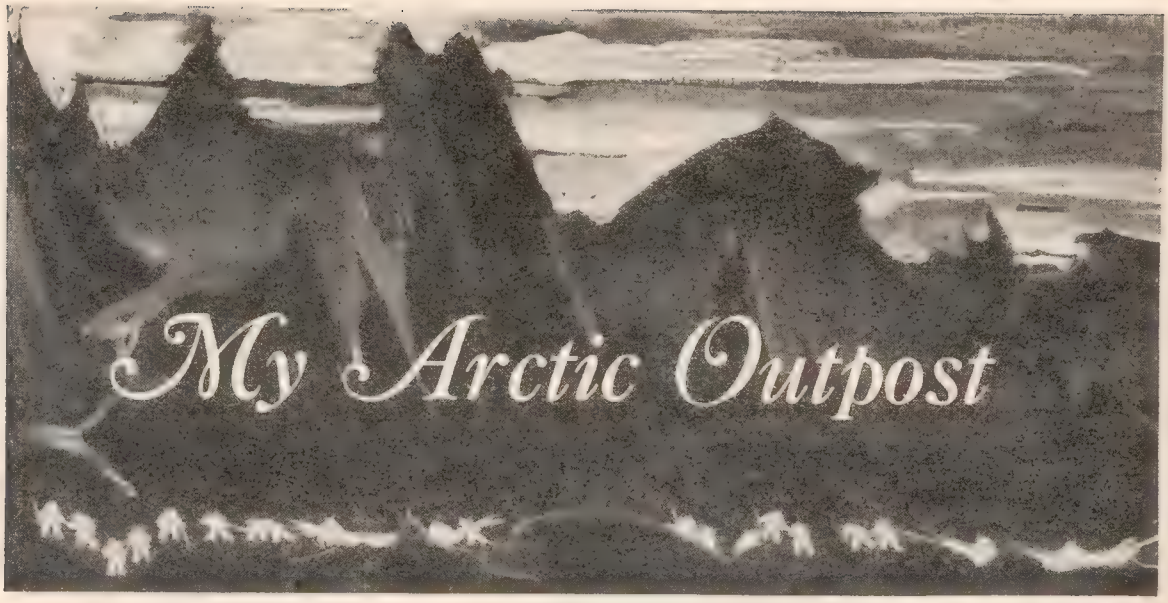
"Not after whut?" queried Bees'-Knees, baffled.

"Whut I wuz axin' Mist' Breck for." Ducktooth was spreading something carefully on the counter. "I finds it in my front room, and—"

Mr. Carnes paused dramatically. Bugwine drew nearer.

"Dis," Mr. Carnes from yet another pocket drew forth something entirely similar, "cor-roborates whut Bugwine uncovered with a flip of de shade. You sees for yourse'f how *dis* piece of cloth, whut I finds shot off on my front-room floor, exactly matches dis *other* piece of blue cloth here whut my dawg done chew out of somebody's pants a week ago! —Provin' dey's both from de same pants—de pants of de boy whut wuz steppin' out wid Emma all de time—*Columbus Collins!"*

"Jest like I tells Miss Geranium, when she wuz in here dis mawnin', huntin' for Bugwine, to forgive him after she hear Columbus run up de alley,"—Bees'-Knees flourished a towel,—"Bugwine Breck always gits his man—even is it aint nothin' but a accident when he does it!"



My Arctic Outpost

For nearly a half-century this grand old Viking of today has conducted a whaling station and trading-post at Point Barrow, the most northerly spot under the Stars and Stripes. He has already narrated many unique adventures of his early days in the Land of the Long Night. Here he comes to an episode tragic indeed: Caught in the ice with the whaler Na-

JUST before leaving the ship for the second time I took some of the polar-bear skins belonging to me and lashed them under the bottom of the boat. This would protect the canvas and make her slide easier. There is nothing that slips along on salt-water ice quite as easily as a bear skin. The Eskimo children often use pieces to slide downhill, the same as our kids use a sled.

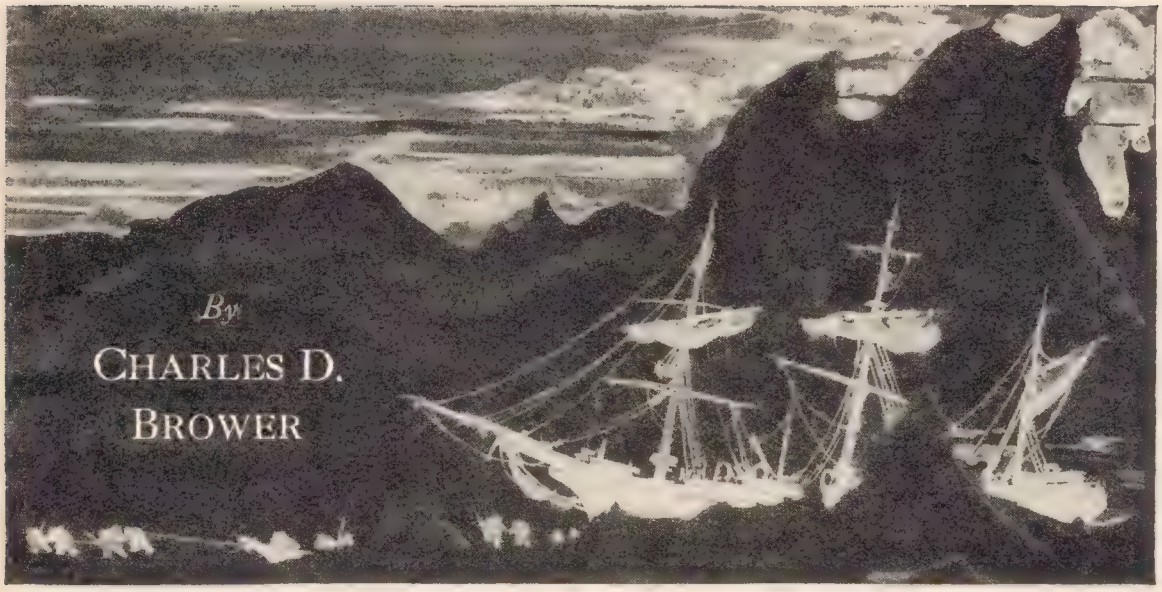
Everyone left the ship with me, except those that were to help haul the boat. Enough for two shifts stayed behind. The boat was light, and two men could carry it along if necessary, or lift it over any kind of ice. It would carry ten people readily, though they would be crowded. It was only meant to cross the leads, if we came to any, or if we had to land on the beach, to ferry the crowd over. Leaving the ship, no one took any grub except what they wanted for use during the day. We came along in fine order until the middle of the day, and then we could see two ships inside of us, apparently at anchor. We could not tell what ships they were until along in the afternoon, then we made out the *Bear* and a sailing bark. Every once in a while I looked back to see how the men were coming. They were now strung out a mile or more along the trail, and still they seemed able to walk. The Captain's crowd I never saw, and I supposed he was at the tail end, seeing that no one was left behind.

In the afternoon an old she bear with two cubs came quite close to us, following along for two miles or more; then, apparently satisfied we were not good to eat, she left. At five that afternoon I had reached the edge of the pack. On the land side of where we were the ice was all broken, with leads running every which way. We were obliged to wait for the boat. We could see the *Bear* and the *William Baylis,* about six miles offshore from the shooting station. I waited where the ice was safe, for the men to come up. As they straggled in, I kept asking where the old man and the boat was. None had seen him, since leaving the ship. The last man was John Egan, the second mate. He told me he had been with the boat, and that after coming two miles from the *Navarch,* the Captain ordered them to return to the ship, taking the boat, food, compass and ammunition.

We were in a fix, and we tried every way we could think of to make the ships see us, but to no avail. In an hour it shut in foggy, and then we did not know which way to turn. The ice was drifting fast to the north, and the nearer we came abreast of the Point, the faster we traveled. Then the piece we were on separated from the pack and we were marooned. Everyone was hungry, and no one had anything to eat, for they had eaten what little they had carried. That had been things they could not ordinarily get, such as canned fruit, a tin of oysters or something of that sort. Not more than two, besides myself, had taken spare boots with them.

North of Point Barrow, in summer, the ice-pack splits. One part drifts to the west, the other to the north or northeast. I knew this, and made my plan to be ready to get on the eastern side if it was possible. I did not want to be carried west, drifting in the old solid pack if I could help it. We all had to stay on our field of ice all night. Near morning, we were a long way north of the Point. It had cleared during the night, and I could see by the water-clouds that we were soon coming to the loose ice where the pack separated. Getting the men together, I tried to cross to the heavy ice east of us, and fortunately we were able to do this after a good deal of hard traveling.

NO sooner were we over, than the ice we had been on drifted away. Then we had to hurry away from the edge, to where the pack was more solid, coming eventually to the old heavy ice, which was dirty and brown. By this time most of the men were all in. Right here we lost the first of our party. Walter Whiting, the steward, complained that he could travel no longer, that he guessed he would stay there. I tried to cheer him, saying it was



By
CHARLES D.
BROWER

varch, and being carried northward, Mr. Brower, with the Captain's wife, the officers and crew, had attempted to gain the shore over the ice—but the whaleboats they dragged with them had been stove in, and occasional open water halted progress. Returning to the ship, they built another and lighter boat, and made ready for a second attempt to gain shore.

too soon to give up. Some of the others were of the same mind, so I talked to them, telling them if we kept going south, we would reach the edge of the pack and be picked up by some ship. This heartened them a lot.

Whiting, however, left the party, and going over to the rough ice, shot himself. That was bad. We had to leave him where he was, and we started to travel south as fast as we could. I had taken a few pieces of hard bread with me, on leaving the ship—filled the top of one of my spare boots with it. I don't think there were more than a dozen pieces, and in the middle of the day I divided them with the men. It was not much, but it helped a little, so the men all kept up for that day. Every little while we had a rest, but sleep was out of the question. There was no place except the wet cold ice to sit on, and that soon made one wish to be walking.

That night it rained; we could not be worse off, so a little rain did not hurt. We never were dry after that.

The morning of the 12th we lost two more of our men; they just gave up. Nothing I could say did any good, and they asked to be shot, as dying did not bother them—it would be a relief from traveling longer. We could not carry them, so we left them, hoping they would come along when they saw we would not stop. Next morning our chief engineer, Sands, went crazy, wandering off every time no one watched him. That same evening he died; when we left him, two firemen stayed behind.

When it was clear, I could see the water-cloud south of us a long distance off. It did not seem to be getting nearer, so I knew the ice was drifting north as fast as we traveled south. The most of the time it was foggy, and the nights seemed the best weather. To keep on our course, I had to keep my watch dry and going. When the fog was low, I could see the sun; and knowing the sun bore south at noon and north at twelve at night, I figured the position at the different hours of the day. This helped in keeping on our course. I was carrying the rifle; we had only one box of cartridges, and I divided these between the men, so if anyone was lost, all the ammunition would not go at once. There seemed nothing alive on the ice—no sign of a bear. Often we came to holes in the pack, but never a seal did we see until near the edge. One day I saw a black bird, and shot it. It was a jaeger of some kind, but there was nothing to eat on it, simply skin and bones; however, I think some of the men tried to eat what there was of it.

ON the fourth and fifth days we lost six more men; they just played out. As they dropped behind, not being able to keep up, some would cry out not to be left behind. This was heartrending; I had never before deserted a man in my life, but there was nothing we could do, and some of us were nearly in their condition. It was only a matter of a day or so, if we did not reach the edge, when we were all bound to go. Just the same, it was hard to listen to their voices dying away in the distance, begging not to be left. Always they called on me, recognizing me as the leader, saying, "Charley, do not leave me behind." These were mostly Portuguese, or from some of the South American countries.

One of the Portuguese we left was a young man, strong and able when he left the ship. He played out by not wanting to leave his good clothes behind. When we left, he had on three suits of clothing, all new. When they got wet they were a weight to carry; he finally had to discard some of them, but not before he was all in. A day later we left him.

Some wore their clothes out; they were of fawn-skin mostly, and when they were wet, they just fell to pieces. Being sewn with linen thread, the weight of the water-soaked skins cut the stitches, and they fell apart. The next to the last man we lost while traveling was the blacksmith, a man from Minnesota. I never did remember his name. He just hung on until the soles of his boots were

worn through, and he was walking on his bare feet over the ice, sharp like cinders. These soon cut his feet to pieces; still he kept on, never complaining. Then he started falling, tearing the fawn-skin pants away from his knees, until they looked like raw meat; his feet were in the same condition, and when we had to leave him, all he said was: "Good-by, boys. I hope you get out." He was the gamest man I ever knew. I wish I knew his name.

The second mate, Egan, went snowblind; otherwise he was as well as the rest. I did not want to leave him, so gave him the end of a line I was carrying. He came along all right, until we reached rough ice; then I led him as best I could. When we came to cracks in the ice or a channel that had thawed partly through, I would tell him how wide the place was, and he would jump. Sometimes he made the other side, and sometimes I hauled him out by the line. He came out with those that were left, in the end.

The fearful trek over the ice, in which sixteen men are lost.

It was foggy on the seventh and eighth days. We had had no sleep, and no food. The tops of high cakes of ice looming through the fog looked like tops of mountains; the men that were left cried out a number of times that land was in sight; then they would stampede for what they mistook for the land. It was hard to convince them they were wrong. They not only tired themselves, but the others of us who had to round them up and get them going on the course south. Through the low fog it is wonderful how a person will be deceived, when he sees the top of high ice. If I had not known just what it was, I would have been as they were, and by now some were getting out of their minds.

After the third day I did not notice the hunger. For a while I thought I could not stand it; then the feeling of hunger passed; and day by day we just tightened up our belts and kept going. There was no shortage of water; that we could get anywhere. All through the pack there are small ponds of fresh water, always higher than the water-level. Then, every point above the salt water, after the sun shines on it awhile, turns fresh, the salt being precipitated. Some of the old ice, and no doubt it is ages old, seems fresh. Every summer, the top melts, and the water running in the hollows makes regular lakes of fresh water. If there are small pieces of ice floating in the ocean, during the summer, the Eskimos bring them to the beach, and in a little while the salt has all gone from them. Then they are the purest water they have to drink.

On the evening of the eighth day we came to the edge of the pack; there was ice drifting south as far as we could see. The wind was northwest and was stripping the ice from the pack. I wanted to get on a piece and drift with it, hoping sooner or later to be picked up or drift close to land somewhere to the east of Point Barrow. Some of the others wanted to stay where they were, hoping the ships would be looking for us along the edge of the heavy ice. I did not think they would be looking for us at all. Most would be whaling, or away to the east. Finally I talked them into trying my way, saying to them: "If the wind changes, all this loose ice will come back to this solid pack. We would be so far from the edge that no one would ever see us, even if we lived that long; and if we have to die, we can do it just as easy on the small ice as on the larger pack."

I picked a fairly large cake to drift on. It was sixty feet long and nearly as wide; one end was higher than the other. So we could have water, if nothing else. When everyone got the idea, two thought they would take cakes of their own. Before I could prevent them, one, a colored fellow from Martinique, got on a small cake and shoved away from the pack. The piece was so small that he had not gone far when it rolled over, and that was the last of him.

The second engineer, Scanlon, walked a short distance from the crowd to get up on a high piece of ice, trying to look off in the distance. The piece he was on was adrift, and when he started back, he tried to jump to the solid ice; he did not reach that far. I suppose he was so weak from hunger he could not keep afloat until some one reached him. He sank and never came up again. He was the last man we lost, making sixteen out of thirty-two.

As the ice outside of our cake drifted away, our piece left the pack, drifting as near as I could judge southeast with the wind. The farther we got from the pack, the faster we seemed to drift, passing all the other pieces, big and small. It was funny to see us headed for a piece of ice, then get almost to it, and have it—or maybe our piece—sheer away, passing each other several yards apart. There must have been a strong current sweeping us to the east.

As we left the pack, there were many seals around. The first night I shot one quite close to our cake, hoping to be able to reach it with one of the small poles the men had brought along to help themselves over the ice. But it was no use, for the seal sank immediately. Seeing it dead only made us think of something to eat.

The farther we drifted, the more open the ice seemed to be. It is always the same; the farther you get from the pack the more scattering the ice. The second morning there were hundreds of whales around, all going to the west. They were with us all day. In the afternoon we could see a two-masted steamer in the mirage south of us. It was the *Karluk,* Captain McGregor. From what he told me later, they must have been thirty miles off at the time, although it seemed close to us. We took three poles, lashed them together, tearing up a shirt to signal them. Of course they did not see us; indeed they never even saw the whales. They were abreast of Smith's Bay, inside the ice.

The next morning I again shot a seal, and another later in the day, but they both sank as soon as dead. In the evening the ice was much thinned out. The schooner *Rosario,* coming from the east, passed about three miles inside of us, and we again set our flag, but it was no use, they just kept sailing away from us. This was too much for one of the men, a boat-header named Enos, and he went insane. If he had not been so weak, we would have had some trouble with him. For a few hours he was raving, trying to do all kinds of things, but hardly able to stand. He finally settled in a stupor and did not move again from where he sat.

Rescue comes after twelve days without either food or rest.

Most of the men were now almost gone. We had been eleven days without food, and had been doing the hardest kind of work. Three, besides myself, seemed to be in fair condition, though weak. One, named Hanson, was a boat-steerer; the other two were seamen. One was from Florida, named Holmes; the other had been a German soldier. He was the only man that had tobacco with him, and he never gave a bit to any of the others. I think some of them would have sold their soul for a chew. He afterwards told me that as long as he had the tobacco, he did not feel hungry. About eleven o'clock in the morning, I was certain I could see land; at two in the afternoon I was sure of it, and a little later I recognized Cape Halkett. From where we were when I first saw land, and the direction of the wind, I had hopes we would come close to shore just

inside the point. The current from the west was too strong, however; instead of drifting in closer, our piece of ice swung along the coast. As we came to Cape Halkett, we were fully two miles from land. I looked in vain for tents. The Eskimos made this their camping place on their way from the Coleville River. Now there was no one around.

Five o'clock that afternoon we raised smoke coming from the east. In a little while a steamer hove in sight. With Cape Halkett on one side and the pack on the other, there was no way they could pass us without seeing us. There was a Siberian Eskimo at the masthead; he reported a herd of walrus on the ice. Walrus seldom go east of Point Barrow. We were all huddled together, and it was difficult to tell just what the fellow had sighted. One of the officers soon had the glasses on us. Then the ship headed our way and soon was alongside taking what remained of the crowd aboard. The steamer was the *Thrasher,* belonging to the Pacific Steam Whaling Company, with Captain Barney Cogan in command. . . . Twelve days without food or rest is a long time.

Everything possible was done for us. The men soon had a little something to eat, but not much—the Captain would not allow that. I did not seem hungry, but wanted to sleep as soon as I got aboard. The steward was a colored fellow I had been shipmates with in the *Grampus,* Felix Terry.

Soon Felix had a tub of hot water ready for me, and I had a bath and then went to sleep; I do not know how long I slept. When I awoke, the ship was at Point Barrow at anchor, and Tom and Fred were aboard to take me home. Four ships were anchored at the Point. One was the *Bonanza.* Sam Smith, the Captain, wanted to stay as long as possible, not caring to leave without knowing if I was dead or alive. Tom wanted to close the station if I did not return. He had all the Eskimos hunting for us with their canoes, all along the ice, on the chance of picking us up. They were staying out days at a time looking for the lost crowd.

One of the first things I asked Tom was if the Captain and his men had got ashore, and he told me their story. Captain Tuttle was in command of the *Bear* that summer, and Jarvis was first lieutenant. They had been looking for the crew of the *Navarch* all summer. Fred had gone aboard to help stand masthead while they were in the ice. Cruising along the ice east of the Point, they came to the Point every night and anchored. Coming in near Cooper's Island, Fred spotted a tent on shore, and hoping to get news of us the boat went ashore. When they came back, they had the captain of the *Navarch* and the men that came in with him.

They left the *Navarch* after abandoning us; taking their boat, they came in over the ice, reaching the water abreast of where they were found, and then crossed to the island. It took them only one day to get ashore. Not all the crew would come in with the Captain; six men were left aboard. When Captain Tuttle asked for the rest of the crew, the Captain told him we had been gone from the ship four days, and no doubt we were all dead and there would be no use looking for us any longer. At that Tuttle quit searching; Jarvis was for staying as long as possible, hoping to pick us up along the pack.

When Jarvis asked the reason the Captain turned back without notifying the rest of us, he had no reason to give. Those that were left behind the last time were some of the helpless ones, with three men that would not take a chance with the Captain. The men that had come in with me were distributed in the four ships at the Point. The crazy man was put aboard the *Bonanza* to be taken out. He died on the passage home. Holmes shipped aboard the *Thrasher,* and was killed that fall, while they were cutting a whale. Four of the other men had their feet amputated later. The others just disappeared, as sailors do anywhere.

While I was gone the *Bonanza* had arrived, discharged her cargo, and taken aboard all our bone and furs, waiting until the last to hear of me and the others on the ice. Mr. Stevenson was to go out in her. I had talked with him about taking out my two eldest daughters, so they could go to school in Ohio. Everything was ready two days after I returned, and the *Bonanza* sailed. My youngest daughter was sick when I arrived, and the same day the others left, she died. It was a sorrowful home for some time.

Mr. Brower's eldest daughters leave for school "outside."

Dr. Marsh and his wife had taken Stevenson's place as teacher and missionary. The old refuge station had been rented to E. A. MacIlhenny of Avery Island, La.; he and two assistants were collecting birds and mammals. Captain Aiken was to go home; later one of the steamers took him aboard.

All the ships left for the west, but a new lot came from Herschel and anchored. Soon after the ice came in, holding them so they had to stay for some time. One, the *Alexander,* came down inside the ridge, anchoring at the house just long enough to land all the provisions they had. Hardly had she gone than the ice crushed, jamming the other steamers at the Point. They were the *Orca, Jessie Freeman, Belvidere* and the schooner *Rosario.* They saw the ice getting thicker every day, until they got desperate and started to cut and blast their way south where we could see young ice and some water. It took them three days to cut and blast six miles; then they were abreast of the station. Here the *Belvidere* sprang her rudder head, and was forced to fix it. They stayed where they were September 19th and 20th.

Sunday the 20th we got word from the east that the *Newport,* Captain Leavitt, and the *Fearless,* Captain McKenna, were caught seventy miles east of the Point, and the *Jeannie* a little more than a hundred miles. The Eskimos that brought us word wanted to know if we could assist them any, in case they had to winter. The *Rosario* lay at Point Barrow; being a sailing vessel, she had to stay where she lay.

Monday morning the three steamers in front of the house started south, cutting their way as they went. Every little way, they could break their way through the young ice by backing, then going ahead full speed. When they came to heavy ice, it took all their power to break through. Next morning they managed to reach the young ice in Peard Bay. The *Jessie Freeman* did not have the power the others did, and here she was caught. After working for several hours Captain Porter abandoned her and the crew walked over the ice to the *Orca* a few miles away. The *Orca* and *Belvidere* got as far as Sea Horse Islands, where the *Belvidere* was jammed behind heavy ice, and there she stayed for twelve months. The *Orca* got as far as Point Franklin; there she was crushed, filling with water to between decks. The ice held her from sinking, she was jammed so hard, and the crew with Captain Sherman returned back to the *Belvidere* for shelter. They left two officers to see what they could salvage from the wreck.

Captain Millard and the wrecked captains held a consultation as to the best thing to do. None of the ships had any spare food aboard. All had wintered at Herschel and had only enough to take them home. They finally agreed to send two men to me asking what I could do for them. Jim Clarke, and another, Officer McMorris,

were the ones that came to me. I immediately sent them back with a team, saying I would have quarters for all that came to me, and that as soon as I had the house ready I would send sleds and bring them all up.

While this was happening south, I fitted Tom and MacIlhenny to go as far as the *Newport* and the *Fearless*, letting them know there would be no starvation. I had plenty to take care of all hands. When Tom came back, he reported another ship in the ice offshore from Cape Simpson. It was not the *Jeannie* or the *Newport*, but looked like the *Navarch*, and it was about thirty miles away.

To make matters more easy, the *Jeannie* had taken all the supplies from the refuge station this summer; there had been rations and clothing and bedding for a hundred men for one year, when the Government established it, and as long as they owned it, they had kept it intact. I made arrangements with MacIlhenny to use the big stove for cooking. I had to use Kelley's house for the men I was bringing from the Sea Horses, and Mac agreed to have some of the officers bunk in the big room of his building. With native help and the officers that came from the wrecked ships, I soon had Kelley's old house ready for the men. A double row of bunks along each side of the house were built, and a large wood stove was placed in the center of the room; when all was completed, I sent Fred with all the sleds I could get ready to bring the men from the two wrecked ships.

I had sent John ahead with a special sled to bring the two captains to the station. On his way down he stopped at the *Jessie Freeman*. Some of the Eskimos camped near the ship had been aboard ransacking the after hold, unpacking a number of cases and throwing straw and excelsior all around; then some one upset a coal-oil lamp, setting fire to the straw. All hands left in a hurry. The *Freeman* was supposed to have a lot of powder in her hold, and no one cared to take a chance putting the fire out. It was not long before the whole ship was in flames. What little food that was in her was lost, and the only things anyone saved were two bags of fox-skins, which eventually were returned to Captain Porter.

As the crew came, I had them placed in the bunk-house, and the officers in the refuge station. Both captains came to our place. Fred had room in the small house he was living in. I had two berths made for them. Tom Ellis, mate of the *Orca*, stayed in our station with two others. When the two crews were all in, I issued a ration for each man, having them come to the station once a week, taking their rations for that period to MacIlhenny's, where the cooks had to cook for all hands. The men in the bunk-house came three times a day for their food and took it to their house. The officers' mess was in the big house.

As soon as their ships were wrecked, the captains gave up all control of their men. I thought it funny that neither of them would try to help manage their crews, but they seemed anxious to be shut of all responsibility, which they shifted to me. They did not even help in bringing their crews to the station. Only one of the officers of the *Belvidere* helped us.

Charley Walker, the second mate of the *Orca*, with some Eskimos had saved quite a lot of provisions from the ship before she sank; these were all hauled to the *Belvidere*, and were a big help to her during the winter. Part of a head of bone aboard the *Orca* was saved, and this was sold during the winter to the station.

As soon as the men were all at the station, I had to go east to the *Newport*, *Fearless* and *Jeannie*, to make some arrangements about feeding their crews. Leaving the station at four o'clock one morning, I made the run of seventy miles to the ships in twelve hours. I soon had found enough to do. The ship in the offing was the *Navarch*, the one we had abandoned with such disastrous results such a short time before. There was a lot of flour and other provisions aboard her, and if I could have them hauled to the ships, it would save hauling from the station. I at once sent my team back with the boys, with orders to Tom and Fred to send all the teams they could get. They were back in three days.

We, at the ships, had not been idle while they were gone. John Thomas, the mate of the *Newport*, had made a trip to the *Navarch*, trying to bring away some little things, but the men that had stayed by her claimed the ship as theirs, and would not allow him to take anything, saying they would salvage the ship, and wanted all the provisions in her. While waiting for the sleds' return, I had a lot of Eskimos that were camped near build a road part way to the ship. The crews of the two ships helped, and by the time the seventeen sleds came, we were ready to work on the food. The first trip, we expected trouble with the men left aboard, and there was a little. We talked them into seeing that they could not keep all this food, while the men ashore needed it. Only one held out, saying he owned the ship and would kill some one before he would let it go.

He did not kill any one that time. Thomas and I had planned what we would do in a case of this kind, and before the fellow was through telling what he would do, we had him in irons, and on his way to the *Newport*. After that there was no trouble.

The first sleds took the men part way in and left them with two Eskimos to see that they were not lost. All hands went to work and soon loaded the sleds with provisions, and by the time all sleds were loaded, these that had taken the men in returned. We had their loads ready for them, and all went back. We made a long string, for with the teams that were there, we had twenty-six sleds.

We traveled all night, reaching the *Newport* and *Fearless* at six in the morning; we rested all day, and started out again that same night. We worked day and night, making a round trip without resting, except at the ships. We took no chances of losing anyone by sleeping on the *Navarch*. The men we sent from the *Navarch* all stayed aboard the two ships, with the exception of the fellow we had to send in ironed. We sent him to the bunk-house with Dr. Marsh, who had come up to see how things were going.

The men we sent from the *Navarch* arrived at the *Newport* in fine shape, that same night, with the exception of two. One was the cook, an old Chinaman who had to be helped most of the way by the "boy;" the other was an old Norwegian by the name of Pete, probably seventy years of age. Pete was all in, and simply could not travel. The Eskimo with him was one that had worked for me several years, Long John Ungertegera. He stayed with Pete all night, keeping him alive the best he could. Pete nearly froze during the night and Long John took off his deerskin parka and put it on Pete, then ran around all night in a cotton undershirt to keep from freezing. At daylight John almost carried Pete on his back to the *Newport*.

We made six trips to the *Navarch* with the teams and then there was nothing left in the shape of food. The

Eskimos had worked so faithfully for us, that we stayed two days while they made trips to the ship, bringing everything there was in the shape of trade, which we let them keep for themselves. On their last trip they took an oak sideboard that was in the after cabin, packed it on two sleds, and brought it all the way to the station as a present for me. I still have it in my home. It is a constant reminder of that hard winter and my sixteen shipmates who lost their lives on our trek over the ice.

We did not finish any too soon, as the day after the men had made their last trip, the wind changed, blowing the ship away, as she was solid in the pack, and as yet intact. The men told me that at one time she had been almost free, with only scattered ice about, and if there had been any one to start the engine, they could have steamed away, but they did not know how far. Once they had been in sight of some high land. It was a long distance from them, bearing south, and no doubt they had seen the mountains near Barter Island, as they had drifted west a long time afterward.

When everything was done, I had to make the trip to the *Jeannie* to see what they needed most. She was lying at Pitt Point, forty miles east of the other two ships. Mason said he could get along with what he had, with the exception of meat, and they did not think they would be short of that, as the Eskimos reported plenty of deer, just east of them. We did bring a man from her later, a young fellow who was supercargo; he stayed with me most all winter.

On the way back I thought I would have a look at the oil lakes at Cape Simpson. They were hard along the edges, as they had been in the summer I camped near them. In the center they were still soft, with a little snow on their surface. There was a small polar bear mired in the one nearest the Cape.

I stayed only one night at the *Newport* and *Fearless;* most of the men had gone to the station. The only foodstuffs we took were some of the potatoes salvaged from the *Navarch,* which we divided with the other ships. I also made arrangements with Leavitt and McKenna to send some of the crew to the station, for it was easier to take the men there than sled the food to the ships all winter.

Going home, I carried the old Chinaman and Pete in my sled wrapped up in the heavy deerskin which we used for tents. It took two days coming home. Just before we arrived at the station, the sled ran on a drift in the dark. Drifts get as hard as frozen ground; this one was only a foot high, and starting from a point, it spread like a wedge. The sled took the sharp edge with the dogs on the run. As the drift widened, it caught both runners and forced them apart until all the stanchions were snapped off at the mortise-holes along the bed of the sled. It was not a nice job repairing in the dark, for I had to find small pieces of wood along the beach, put the stanchions back in place and then lash the wood on each broken piece. It took an hour or more, and during that while my cargo of old men ran around to keep warm; then I had to wrap them in their deerskin to keep them from freezing. We eventually reached the station about eight that night and were mighty glad to be home once more.

The first thing next morning there was a delegation from the bunk-house, wanting to know about their rations. They complained they did not get what was allowed them. That first difficulty was easily settled. Mac was giving them what he thought they ought to have, as the food was all sent to his place to be cooked. They thought he was holding out on them; I made them take their own allowance and portion it out to the men doing the cooking, and there was no more bother; if they were short, that was their own fault.

Talking things over with the captains and MacIlhenny, we thought it would be a good plan to send a man overland to let people on the outside know the men were all safe and that there would be no starvation. The man chosen was George Tilton, second mate of the *Belvidere.* I built a sled and hired a man to take him as far as Point Hope. The company had a station there, where he could get another outfit and a guide to take him to St. Michaels; from there on he would have to be governed by what the Army officers would do for him. After George left, we sent another man, Charles Walker, to Herschel Island. From there he was to go to Fort McPherson on the Mackenzie River; the Hudson's Bay Company passed him from post to post until he reached Edmonton. Tilton went south to Hope, then to Kotzebue Sound, crossing the mountains by way of Buckland River to Norton Sound; then he trailed on to the Army post at St. Michaels. After a short rest he crossed to the Yukon, then the Kuskoquim and on over the divide to Katmai, where he found an old dory. With this fragile craft he crossed Shellikoff Strait to Kodiak Island, where he got a small steamer to Vancouver Island. Both men reached civilization within a few days of each other, in April.

When most of the wrecked men had been housed, and their rations for twelve months figured out, things settled down for the winter. My Eskimos that worked for the station were most all around. It was impossible for me to give them the foodstuffs they had been getting as part of their pay. Calling them all in, I explained this to them, and promised to make it up to them in some other way. At the same time I wanted all the hunters to go out and get as much meat as they could for the white men. This they were only too willing to do. There was an abundance of all kinds of ammunition at the station; and they were supplied with all that I could give them, and all went away promising to do their best. I had others go to the rivers to fish, while some of the younger ones were kept to run sleds, in case there was hauling to do.

They certainly worked steadily. I had twelve hundred carcasses of caribou and thirty thousand pounds of fish hauled into the station that winter—all we could use. No one was short of meat, and what small stores we were short of did not hurt them any. There was no sickness in the crowd around my place, and only two deaths in the whole outfit until spring. One man froze to death, and another died aboard the *Belvidere* from some sickness. In the spring one man died of heart failure at the station and another died aboard the *Jeannie.*

To help things along I took stock of the tobacco; there was plenty to give each man a pound a month for all the time they would be with me. I told them all to be up on a certain day, and they were there, bright and early. Opening the warehouse doors, I let them all in at once. I had a book with their names in it, and called them one by one; Fred gave each his tobacco, either smoking or chewing. When they were finished, I looked at the shelves in the warehouse, where I kept all kinds of small

articles—and they were empty. Everything the sailors could hide under their shirts was gone, and I never got any of it back again. For a time I thought I would give them no more tobacco, but after thinking it over, I decided it was my own fault. I knew what kind of men the whaling ships have, and had no business trusting them. Of course they knew I missed what was stolen, for it was talked about in our house, and it soon reached the men, who thought it a great joke.

The next time tobacco-day came around, I was fixed for them. I had Jim Clarke and Fred, each with a pick-handle, inside the door. When I came with the book, they all wanted to crowd in as before. I then warned them that if two men came in at once, the one whose name had not been called would have his head broken with a club. They took it all in good part, laughing about it, but there was no pilfering that time nor after, in the warehouse.

One of their tricks was to watch for the sleds coming in with fish. There would usually be five or six sleds to a train, and when they came in sight, the men from the bunk-house would go to meet them, saying they would help them in. They helped all right—each man would steal a fish or two, drop them along the trail and cover them into the snow. After the sleds were unloaded, back they went, dug up the fish, and carried them to the bunk-house, where they cooked them.

Fuel was our greatest bother; I had only enough coal to keep their cook-stove going. MacIlhenny had only enough for his own use. When the sleds were not in use hauling meat and fish, I had the Eskimos hauling wood from the sandspits east of Point Barrow. This was a slow job, as most of the wood was wet and a long way from the station. The men themselves skirmished all the wood along the shore that was near; then they tried the graveyard, leaving nothing that would burn.

The Baby's mother camped on moonlight nights on the pile of wood with which she had covered his coffin, but it was no use; they got the whole lot one dark night.

Late in the fall a native died who worked for the station. It was customary, when anyone employed at the station died, to furnish a coffin and all new clothing for the burial. One day Arnivina, the wife of the man that died, came and told me she was sure some of the men had been to the coffin and taken the mittens from her dead husband. I told her I did not think they would do that, but she was sure, as the mittens were of an unusual pattern and some one had sold a pair just like them in the village. To have her satisfied, I had her go look at the corpse. Sure enough, the coffin had been opened and not only were the mittens gone, but all the clothes had been stripped from the body, and it was lying naked in the box. I gave her a new outfit, and had her and her family clothe the corpse once more and then nail the box securely. Two days later she told me they had been there again. This time they had not only undressed the corpse but rolled it out on the snow and took the coffin for firewood. When I spoke to the men, they all denied doing it. Some of the worst ones tried to lay the blame on the Portuguese and negroes, none of whom would have gone near a dead man in daylight, let alone in the dark.

Obtaining food, fuel and clothing by unscrupulous tactics.

Early in the winter some of the seal-hunters had their rifles stolen. It was usual for them to leave their guns and spears on the high ice some little distance from their houses, picking them up as they went hunting the next day. I soon found these and returned them to their owners.

As the holidays approached, the men in the bunk-house got up an entertainment, giving their show Christmas night. Everyone had a big dinner, with all kinds of fixings I had saved from our own stores. I don't think there were any more satisfied men in civilization than the crowd that day. The show wound up with a prize-fight—some fight as long as it lasted! A negro and one of the white sailors from the *Jessie Freeman* mixed, and we had to separate them at last, as there was no making them quit when time was called.

In January, 1898, some one of the Eskimos reported a ship in the ice to the southwest. They could see her from the highland at Skull Cliff. At first I thought they were mistaken, but two days later she came close to the land, twelve miles south of the house, and then I had some of our men go out to her with sleds. They returned the next day, with sleds all broken by the rough ice, saying that she was the *Navarch,* that she was fast in the pack and was drifting slowly up the coast, two miles from the beach.

On the twelfth of the month, she had drifted abreast of the station, where the pack jammed, with the pressure from the southwest holding the ice in. I had all the Eskimos we could find around cut a road to her through the heavy pressure ridge; and while they were working at the road the pack surged inshore, finally crushing the *Navarch* up on the ice and almost cutting the bottom in two. It left her as if we had brought her in for our benefit. There were eighty tons of coal in her hold, just what we wanted for the men to keep them comfortable, and do their cooking. The men finished the road at three o'clock of a Saturday, and they brought the two whaleboats ashore, which had been left on her cranes. We expected to start hauling coal Monday morning. That same evening two men from the bunk-house walked out to the ship and made a fire in her blubber room, using straw from the mattresses in the forecastle, and small pieces of wood as fuel. Later I asked them what they thought they were doing, but all I could get out of them was they wanted a light to find some rope to make pads for their boots. Some Eskimos tried to extinguish the fire, but it had too much headway, and burned the hull and all the coal. We could see the flame from the station, and wondered how the fire started. Some of the Eskimos came about midnight and told us; they were a hard-looking lot, for their shirts were singed so there was no fur left on them, they had no eyebrows, and very little hair on their heads.

It was hard to believe, when we first heard that some of the wrecked men set fire to the ship. We wanted the coal for them, and were not asking them to haul it, as they had no clothing fit to stay out in. The two men that set her afire were both from the *Orca;* one was a native of Guam; the other called himself an American and claimed Denver as his home.

I had plenty of advice as to what I should do; it ran all the way from hanging to flogging them. But I did nothing. There was nothing that I could do that would replace the fuel, so I turned them over to the men in the bunk-house, advising them to lick them every time they felt cold, as I would furnish no more fuel to them for their house, either wood or coal. If they wanted wood, they could haul it themselves. The men did not punish them, seeming to feel they were telling the truth. That was the last of the *Navarch.*

The sun returned January 21st, then the weather became good and cold. Desiring a heavy parka one day, I asked Toctoo to find it for me. Then for the first time I heard a good yarn. It seems that while I had been adrift last summer, Toctoo, who still retained some faith in the devil-doctors, had paid the shirt to one that had promised to bring me home. He was busy at his endeavors in my

room, using his drum and going on with his talk to the devil, making all kinds of noises. Fred happened to hear him, and going inside, he hauled him out of the room, then threw him out of the house. The old fellow stood and cursed Fred for some time, putting all kinds of devils on him. He stood in the snow with my parka on, and with upraised arm called on the Toondrah to keep Fred from ever killing a whale. Fred had been our luckiest whaleman. But anyone inclined to superstition might find evidence of the medicine-man's power, for Fred never caught another whale.

A wanton waste of fuel. . . . The devil-doctor's curse on Fred.

In February, Jim Wing, the first mate of the *Belvidere*, came to the station, bringing the *Orca's* cook, a big fat colored man. He was so fat and heavy he could hardly waddle, so Jim had to carry him all the way on the sled. Besides the negro Jim had a box weighing over one hundred and fifty pounds; he did not know what it was, but some one had put it on the sled, saying it did not weigh anything, and asked him to bring it along. While they were on their way up the coast we had the three coldest days of the winter. Jim froze the end of his long nose, eventually losing a quarter of an inch off the end. When we opened his freight, we found it was a box of Bibles from the Salvation Army which had been put aboard in San Francisco and never opened. When Jim found what he had been pulling all the way from Sea Horse Islands in weather fifty-six below zero, it took more than a box of Bibles to purify the atmosphere. I had to keep him two weeks until his nose was so he could travel.

Some of the Barrow Eskimos returned from Herschel Island early in March, and among these were Mungie and Pisa. We had heard that the latter had been run out of Herschel, for beating to death a little girl he had adopted. After having been given one hundred lashes by the sailors, they let him go. He could hardly walk, but traveled west until he found natives at Flaxman Island and then moved to Utkiavie. He said that there was nothing to eat to the eastward and so he came to the station. No one said anything to him about his being flogged. Tom wanted him for his boat, and as he had been a good man for us, I hired him. The ships furnished the whisky that set him crazy, and they were as much to blame as he. We were busy all the month of March covering boats and getting things ready for the whaling; we were going to try using some of the crew from the wrecked ships. I was planning to have twelve canoes out this spring, and I had been saving hard bread for the spring.

Besides the boat-building, we had to haul in meat, sending large quantities to the ships; but just as soon as the whaling started, the ships would have to do their own carrying. Teams were coming in every day from inland bringing from ten to twenty caribou at a time. I never saw so many deer as we had around that winter. The most of them were hauled a distance of fifty miles or more. We had all our ice-houses full, and the ships made ice-houses in the heavy sea ice. Not only were there many deer, but other animals were also numerous. MacIlhenny could not have picked a better year for his work, for nearly every sled brought him some specimen from the interior; the country was alive with lemming of both kinds.

On the morning of March 28th I was standing along side our canoe-rack, talking to Captain Sherman, and I saw two sleds coming from the south. Thinking they were some of the men from Wainwright, I took no notice of them until they pulled up alongside of me; then one man spoke, and to my surprise it was Lieutenant Jarvis, and with him was Dr. Call. Both were from the cutter *Bear*. The first thing that I thought was that the *Bear* was lost, and they had come to me for shelter; but Jarvis soon told me they were on a relief expedition, bringing a deer herd from Wales, Port Clarence and where Nome is today. They had been all winter on the journey. The deer were scheduled to arrive in a day or so in charge of Mr. Lopp.

It seems when the *Alexander* arrived in San Francisco, reporting that the other ships could not get out, there had been a lot of anxiety as to how the crews would fare that winter for food. The ship-owners had gone to Washington to see if the Government could or would try to send relief to the men in the Arctic. President McKinley called for volunteers from the Revenue Service to go to their assistance, they being the logical ones to undertake the work. The *Bear* was north every summer; her officers knew the coast and people, and could make themselves understood.

Jarvis was at home in the city of Washington; his wife was about to be confined with her first child, and he did not wish to come, but he was the man best fitted to have charge of the overland expedition. Lieutenant Berthof and Dr. Call also volunteered and were accepted. The *Bear* was fitted out in San Francisco; supplies for twelve months were put aboard, and she sailed for the north, reaching Cape Vancouver, south of the mouth of the Yukon River. Jarvis and the others were landed at this point, with all the provisions they needed to carry them to St. Michaels. Jarvis bought a sled and a team of dogs and hired a guide to St. Michaels, and from there followed the coast to Point Barrow. He left Berthof at Point Hope to take charge of any men he might have to send down to the coast.

On their way north Jarvis met George Tilton in Norton Sound. At Cape Nome he found Charley Antisarlook, an Eskimo who owned deer. He persuaded him to come along with him, and drive his deer to Port Clarence, and at that place he got Mr. Lopp to come along, bringing the deer he had in his charge. At Cape Prince of Wales they collected more deer, Lopp in charge; they drove the deer across Kotzebue Sound, from Espingberg to Cape Kreuzenstern, and then over the pass in the mountains to just below Point Lay. They reached the station March 30th, two days after Jarvis.

Lopp stayed only two days, then returned with a dog-team to Wales, making the return journey in twenty-one days. It is about seven hundred and fifty miles. The afternoon of the 29th Jarvis and I had a conference as to what had been done. After investigating, he told me everything was fine and no one could have done better, and he left everything in my hands, although he had authority from Washington to take full charge.

The *Bear* arrives on a relief expedition, bringing supplies

There were several things I wanted done, that I had been unable to do. One was to take the men out of the bunk-house, where they had been living all winter. It was filthy; I was afraid they would be getting scurvy or something worse. For some time I had wanted Marsh and MacIlhenny to give some of their spare room to the men; if they would take thirty each in their spare rooms, I could take the rest in an empty warehouse, fitting bunks along the sides. Jarvis agreed with me, and the next morning he consulted Mac and Marsh. Two days later the men were billeted in their houses. This gave me a chance to tear down the bunk-house for firewood, which we needed badly. The next thing was to make the men exercise; several ball nines were organized, and every day that it was fit, they had to get out and play ball or take a walk.

Then came the question of clothing; most of what the men had was worn out, or had been traded away during the winter. I had given them everything I had in the store. All winter I had the women tanning skins making mitts and socks for them; when a lot was made, the men had to take turns in being supplied. Those that were hauling meat, of course, had to be well clothed, and after they were supplied the others had what was left. We ran out of blankets and quilts, but we made quilts, as Mac had plenty of cotton batting which he used to fix his birds. I had the print calico; this we sewed together, using the batting for stuffing. We had quilting parties all winter, at the old refuge station, until all hands had bed-covers. Jarvis suggested we have the Eskimo make a "tarpaulin muster," each one giving everything in the shape of clothing he could spare. We explained the need, and they gave all they had in the shape of white man's clothing, especially underwear and shirts; there were no pants to be found. They gave freely without ever expecting to have their clothing paid for, but I took the name of every one that gave anything; and later, when the *Bear* arrived, they were all well paid for what they had done. As soon as he could, Jarvis visited the ships to the east, along with Dr. Call, and found no sickness at any of them.

Shortly after Lopp left, Charley started killing deer; they were so poor that they were not fit to eat, so Jarvis had them hold off until later, as we had on hand all the meat we could use. Sometime later Jarvis had killed something over a hundred. No one ever ate any of the meat, as they were nothing but skin and bone after their hard drive.

One day Mac and I were talking about the condition of the deer, saying that it was a shame to kill any of them, as they were unfit for food, and we did not need them. Mac said that if they killed none, there would be no chance to say they arrived just in time to prevent starvation. In a joke I reported this to Jarvis. It was the only time I saw him mad, and he got after both of us.

On April 15th I sent the boats to the flaw; no whales had been reported but there was lots of seal, and we wanted to get all we could in case the other meat ran short. The spring was the same as it had been all winter; seals were more numerous than I had ever seen them. My boats killed them by hundreds. We had the ice-houses full, and then stacked on the ice along the beach.

April 25th the pack came in and closed the lead ahead of the heavy pack. The young ice, eight inches thick, came up to the flaw, crushing, so that there was no water in sight for miles, except one hole a hundred yards long and twenty wide. This was just south of the village, and a school of white whales, coming north, was caught here. Two of my boats were close to them, and when they found the beluga, it was as if the water was boiling. There must have been several thousand of them, and the water was covered with their heads and backs as they came to spout. The men in the boats used all their ammunition and then came back to the house for more. Then everyone went and took a look at them. There must have been six hundred killed and saved. I had half as many hauled to the station. The largest part of them sank as soon as killed, and it was an awful waste of meat. No one could stop the shooting; the whites were as bad as the Eskimos. MacIlhenny got some good pictures of the whitefish in the hole. They stayed there for several days. When the ice broke, the edge was three miles farther out and all boats were hauled to the flaw.

Whaling started off just as well as we could wish. Tom Gordon caught the first whale. Pisa as usual did the killing with the bomb-gun. Then, one after another, my boats killed eight, four of them big fellows. Mac had fitted a boat for some of the wrecked men, and they caught a small whale. Then he fitted a native boat for half they caught. Took-a-loo-na caught a big whale, and thinking he would get the best of Mac, they cut the whale and took all the bone to the village, where they divided it between the boat's crew. They sent Mac ten slabs of bone for the food he had advanced them. When Mac heard this, he took a crowd of men to the village and collected half the bone, taking it all to his storehouse.

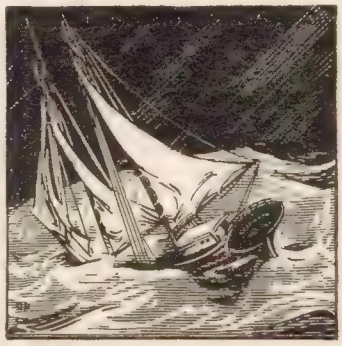
Took-a-loo-na complained to Jarvis, so the Lieutenant had all of the bone brought to my place and asked that all who had been parties to the transaction come there in the afternoon. Mac stated his case, telling how he had made a contract with the boat's-crew for half they caught that spring, he to furnish the food for the whaling season, as well as the bombs. For some time Took-a-loo-na, while he did not deny this, would not say anything except that Mac was not giving him enough for half a head of ten-foot bone. As that was not what we wanted, we finally made him acknowledge the agreement. Jarvis divided the bone in half, and each party received his part. Mac had only given the boat and crew half a sack of flour, some tea, sugar and tobacco, and the bombs he furnished were old ones he had picked up from the ships in the summer. I think Mac had the best trade I ever saw in the North, but it was all fair.

In May, when the ducks began to fly north, I had Tom Ellis and Captain Akin go to the shooting-station and camp; they were good shots, and supplied the men with all the ducks they could eat all summer long. Later MacIlhenny went to the camp; he was the best shot I have ever seen, and got more birds than all the rest together. When the men would not exercise, Jarvis made them go to the duck camp and carry ten ducks each as punishment; they were soon all anxious to play ball; then they had to take turns at packing ducks.

During the latter part of whaling, the weather became pretty warm for this part of the world. Our boats had two whales at once, and the women were all hauling bone and blubber. When they went out to where the whales were, they had taken their outer parkas off, leaving them on the high ice along the road, the same as the men did with their rifles. Some sailors from the bunk-house thought it would be a good opportunity to annex a shirt or two, and they helped themselves. The women, not finding their parkas, came and reported to me. Jarvis happened to be there, so I told him what had happened. He at once went after the men until he found out who had been on the ice that day; then he found the remains of two good attigas. The men that had taken them had cut off the lower part of the shirts, making them as short as a man's; they did not have sense enough to fix the hood. The hood of a woman's parka is entirely different from a man's, and every woman can tell her own clothing. In making them, they always have something they make different from anyone else, so they recognized their items without any trouble. After seeing what had been done, they were mad through; I think if this had happened in

the fall, the Eskimos would not have been so kind to the sailors.

In the spring, just before Jarvis arrived, some of these men took their allowance of molasses and flour to the village and had some Eskimos start a hooch mill. They were all ready to distill their stuff when I heard of it. Going to the village, I smashed the stills, and then went to the bunk-house and talked to the men. The Eskimos would not tell me who they were; they had been bribed not to. I talked in vain to the men. None would say who the guilty ones were. Then I stopped all their sweetening, issuing neither sugar nor molasses. Three days later two of the men came and told me they were the guilty ones, that if I wanted to punish anyone, to stop their allowance. The other men were making their life miserable, and they added that if I would overlook their offense, they would promise never to try it again. I called off the ban on sugar and had no more trouble. That was the last liquor made at Barrow.



Late in June there came a crush from the southwest, pushing the ice some distance up on the shore. The schooner *Rosario* at Point Barrow had been safe all winter; but this crush shoved her high up on the sand, crushing in all her starboard side. Captain Coffin and his crew all came to the station, and I kept them until the ships arrived.

We celebrated Fourth of July by having all kinds of games and races. The best thing in the whole layout was the pie-eating contest between two colored fellows. The men in the bunk-houses put a good one over on me: I was buying bone from the Eskimos, and a few of them wanted to know if I would buy bone from them. I was agreeable as long as they did not steal it, warning them that if they did, they would suffer for it when the *Bear* came. They wanted cash for their bone, and would take nothing but silver dollars. In those days no one ever wanted money, but I thought they were trying to have a little ahead when they got outside, so I promised them I would pay them three dollars a pound, as long as the money held out. Some days later I found they took the dollars to the village, trading one silver dollar for a large slab of bone, weighing anywhere from five to seven pounds; the Eskimos were using them to make heads for their pipes. I did not find out what they were doing until my dollars were all gone. Some of the men did quite well.

In July, Jarvis wanted to send an expedition down to the coast to meet the *Bear*. I fitted a canoe for them, and Fred went along as guide. Jarvis wanted Captain Sherman to be in charge of the outfit.

Sherman's orders were not to go south of Point Lay. There were no ships when they arrived, but in a few hours they saw smoke offshore to the south, and all hands got in the boat and paddled to head off the ship. It proved to be the *Bear*, coming under full steam, the first ship to get in the Arctic that summer.

Sherman and party aboard, the *Bear* headed in to Point Lay, picked up the camping outfit and came along north as far as Ice Cape. She waited there a day or so and then rounded Blossom Shoals, anchoring at Wainwright. Later she was able to get by the Sea Horse Islands, and reached us sometime in September. When she did get here, there was no way to get aboard of her except walking over the ice; the ridge was hard and fast aground, with hardly a drop of water inside.

Some of us were soon aboard, hoping to hear news from home, but there was no news, for wintering where they did, there was no chance for them to know much more than we ourselves. Arrangements were made to take the men aboard as soon as possible. That evening the steamer *Jeanette* arrived and tied up to the ice near the cutter. Just after she arrived the pack came in and the ice stayed closed for nearly two weeks. I had to keep the men ashore, for the pressure on the *Bear* was so great that for a time it looked as if she would be wrecked. The crew started to put all the provisions on the heavy ice, to have something to live on, if the worst happened. The pressure of ice against the *Bear's* side was so great that it buckled the engine-room floor, holding it that way for several hours, until the ice slacked a little. It did not look good for the *Bear*, and I think it was as close a shave as she ever had in the North. The *Jeanette* lay behind a point of ice and had no difficulty.

When the ice moved away from the ridge, it soon broke through; the crush had broken it so badly that most of it floated away with the northeast wind. We were not long getting the men aboard, and starting for the outside. I had to go along, as I had charge of the men all winter and kept all the accounts, and no one would settle without me. Tom Gordon was left in charge, and I shipped Jack Hadley to stay with them for a year.

On our way south the *Bear* called at Kotzebue Sound. There had been a gold-rush there during the summer and the beaches were lined with tents. Several ships lay at anchor close to Cape Blossom, twelve miles from the village. A number of galvanized iron houses were up and building, and there were men and women everywhere, hardly any of them knowing what they were going to do. I saw one old couple from Pennsylvania that had sold their home, coming all this distance expecting to pick up enough gold on the beach to make them rich. The stories about the gold were all fake; up to that time no gold had been found in the Kobuk regions. Stories had been told of how the Eskimo were using lumps of gold for bullets, that they found them everywhere. Another was of a ship hauling up several gold nuggets in the mud on the flukes of her anchor. It was a crime, as here were all these people with their outfits, most of which they later had to give away. They wanted passage out, and they begged Captain Tuttle for a chance to go where there was a steamer to take them back home again. Many had already taken their small boats and started for St. Michaels.

Leaving here, we ran into Port Clarence, stayed a few hours and then started for Cape Nome to land Charley Antisarlook, the Eskimo deer-herder. Long before this there was trouble with the wrecked men, as they were a hard lot. Aboard the cutter there were not accommodations for all to sleep at the same time, so the officers thought it a good plan to put them in watches, the same as are kept aboard ship. This they would not stand for; those that got a chance to sleep would not turn out, raising all kinds of trouble. When they got too bad, the Captain had the whole lot up, asking those who wanted to obey his orders to stand on one side. There were not over six that moved; the rest he had put in irons, chaining the whole lot along the rail until they gave in. Most of them came to their senses in a few hours, but we carried some to Seattle in irons, setting them free when they were sent ashore.

We anchored at Cape Nome, and Charley's wife came aboard with her family. Then we heard of some white men finding gold at Anvil Creek. At the time there were only eight whites there. Some of them were men that

had left Kotzebue in their boats. Others were runaway sailors from the whaling fleet, that got away in Port Clarence. None of them came aboard—they were too busy. Charley wanted me to come ashore with him, saying he had plenty of food for the winter. For a time I wanted to go, but Jarvis and Tuttle talked me out of it. In a short time the beach was to be lined with buildings, and the town of Nome would be where was now barren tundra. We carried the first news of the gold strike at Nome to St. Michaels, and many men left there soon after. St. Michaels was a busy place in 1898. The Klondike was in full blast, besides other mining-camps up the river.

One night while we lay there Lieutenant Berry, Captain Sherman and myself took a trip ashore in the launch. When we landed, the Lieutenant left one of their men to look after the launch; as soon as we were gone, the man left also, and got drunk before time to go aboard. When we started, there was no water in the boiler, but we did not know it at the time, and as we neared the cutter, the boiler exploded, scalding the engineer badly; the rest of us were too far aft to be hurt much, but we were burned a little. We signaled the *Bear*, and they sent a boat to tow us to the ship, where the doctor had a job with the scalded man. Here we first learned of the Spanish-American war. It had begun and ended while we were in the North. Certainly it was glorious news for us, to hear what our men and ships had done. The officers in the cutter were not so pleased, to think that they had been out of all this fighting.

The Alaska gold-rush. . . . Mr. Brower visits in the East again.

Leaving St. Michaels, we headed for Unalaska, where we stayed a few days for coal. We left some more of the wrecked men there, as two English ships needed crews. Their men had deserted for the gold-mines, going from Unalaska in the boats that called for coal. We lay at Dutch harbor, over at the A. C. Company's part of town; several large stern-wheel steamers were building which were eventually to go up to the Yukon.

We had an uneventful voyage out. Arriving at Seattle, Captain Sherman, Porter and myself were some of the first to land. We did not stay long, but fixing up a little, we took the train the same afternoon for Tacoma. I proceeded immediately to San Francisco and reported at the office, where everything was talked over, the whole story told, and then plans were made as to what we should do regarding compensation from the Government for taking care of all the men. It was finally agreed that I should go to Washington the coming winter and see what could be done.

I arrived home in New Jersey late in November, stopping on the way to visit Mr. Stevenson in Ohio and to see my daughters he had taken care of for me. As soon as I reached home, Mother and Father wanted to know where the children were and why I had not brought them along home with me, saying if they were to be in civilization they wanted them. They were so insistent, I had to send my sister for them, and they stayed with their grandparents until I came north in the summer; then my sister took them and raised them in West Orange, until one married and the other became a teacher.

(After some time in Washington and the East, Mr. Brower finally won the attention of Secretary of the Treasury Gage, and by Congressional action was "given $3,000 for extraordinary services. Mr. Gage also said I was entitled to a medal as well as those that had received them." After attending to some other business and personal affairs, he set out for the North again.)

The *Bonanza* was loaded and ready to sail May 15, and everything was settled with the other company. I sailed in the schooner for home. We took along Mr. and Mrs. Spriggs, who were going to Barrow as missionaries. They were newly married and on their honeymoon. For some time, I don't think they enjoyed it very much; both were seasick for several days. They were not the only ones under the weather on the trip. Three days out I was taken sick. In fact I had been feeling none too well before leaving San Francisco. My ailment developed into typhoid fever; where I contracted it I never knew.

I had plenty of doctors all the time I was sick. Sam the Captain had his book and the ship's medicine-chest, and every chance he got, he dosed me. Then Mr. O'Brien, the mate, had his own medicine. He did not believe in anything except homeopathic sugar pills, and he gave me these to counteract the medicine Sam was giving me. Mr. Spriggs had taken a short course in some kind of doctoring, and had his own outfit. Every once in a while he got in his work. They must have enjoyed themselves even if I did not.

As soon as I knew what the matter was, Sam wanted to return to San Francisco. I could see no sense in that, as the schooner had to go to Barrow with her cargo; if we had returned, it would have been only so much time lost.

My first appearance on deck was at Indian Point, when Frank Eldridge carried me up and put me in a steamer chair for a short while. Some days before this, I had refused to take medicine from any of the doctors. Frank said that from then on I started to get better. One day Frank asked me what I wanted to eat; there was nothing I could think of except cheese and oranges. He started to get them for me but Mrs. Spriggs heard what I had said, and Frank caught the devil, and I did not get what I wanted.

All the north-bound ships were at Port Clarence on our arrival, waiting for the tender to bring them coal and fresh provisions. We had potatoes for two of the ships that belonged to our company. It was not long before the captains were aboard of us to hear news. I was on deck, bundled up and lying back in a chair. None of the captains recognized me. Even when I spoke to Captain Sherman, he did not know me until I told him who I was.

The *Bonanza* was the last ship to leave for the north. We were not on a whaling voyage, so wanted to keep behind the ice. I was satisfied that all the time I was picking up strength that I was to need later. By the time we reached Point Hope I was feeling much better. Our first call was at the company's station in the bight on the south side of the Point, sixteen miles from the village.

As this was where I had to start taking the census, I began around the station. *(While in Washington, Mr. Brower had accepted the job of taking the census of northern Alaska.)* Leaving there, we went to the mission on the north side of the point, a mile from the village. Dr. Driggs was in charge; and he was a character. I asked him what he was short of, in the way of food, his own stores not having arrived yet. The only things he wanted were a box of potatoes and a gallon of whisky.

Finishing at the village I had to go on the south side of the point eight miles away. There was a settlement there where a number of Portuguese were living, mostly married to native women. The settlement had been named Jabbertown by the ships, from the noise made when all hands got to talking at once. Four miles south of Jabbertown there was another small settlement, so I walked down and finished the work that night, going aboard ship the next morning. Leaving Point Hope, we stopped at Wevok, the village just north of Cape Lisburne. Only a few people were there in the summer, but they could tell me where most of the people were camped along the shore for the summer. On the Cape, three miles below,

there are several rookeries of murres. The Eskimos at Wevok were gathering eggs for the winter, putting them up in boxes and old barrels they had saved for that purpose. I bought two barrels to take north with me, as the natives at Utkieavie were crazy for them, even if they were "started" some. The cliffs are very precipitous along the western edges. On the first visit the Eskimos usually clear the ledges, shoving everything into the water. The next day the ledge is covered again with fresh eggs. The murres lay one egg; it is much larger on one end than on the other, so when it rolls, it goes in circles, instead of a straight line off the cliff. Puffins, cormorants and seagulls also lay their eggs on these ledges.

At Ice Cape, we stopped only long enough for me to take the names of the people. From Ice Cape up, it was all clear water, and as it was getting late, I did not have Sam stop at the other villages; it was easy to visit them during the fall or winter.

When we arrived at Barrow every one seemed glad to see me; they had been worried at what the ships told them of my sickness. Things were in fine shape; Tom and the boys had a good season, catching and buying over fourteen thousand pounds of whalebone.

Tom and Fred were going out for the winter so I had to take hold at once and get the cargo ashore and this kept us busy for the next few days. Then the *Bear* arrived. Captain Jarvis had a lot of presents to give the natives to repay them for what they had done for the wrecked men. When that was finished, Jarvis came ashore to pay the station a visit. I met him on the beach, to walk up with him; as we were nearing the small houses, where the Eskimos live, Tom came across the sandspit, and steered us more toward the station. I thought nothing of it at the time, but after Jarvis had gone, Tom told me quite a yarn:

Pisa, the Eskimo that had been flogged at Herschel two years before, had, on leaving the Island, come east to Flaxman Island. There he had met some natives from Nubook, who were wintering there. Not being much of a deer-hunter, he met with no luck all winter. The others had a little meat they wanted to keep for their families, so told him to keep on for Point Barrow; instead of doing that, he had stayed around their camps. Finally one day as one of the men was off hunting, Pisa had come to his camp, killing the man's two wives and a little child; then he lay in wait until the hunter returned, and shot him also. Then he had moved to the other camp, where a man, two women and two children were living. Pisa first killed Elebrah, the man, while he was away from camp; then at the camp, he killed one of the women and two children, shooting them while in bed in their tent. The other woman he had let live, taking her for a second wife. She was almost blind. There was food enough to last them for some time; then they sledded to the station. The blind woman was afraid Pisa would kill her if she told, so nothing was known about the killing until the winter I was out. Then the blind woman had been able to get away from Pisa, and told the story in the village. Pisa was being watched all the time. Some of the relatives of the Point folks had gone to investigate the matter, saying if it was as told, they would kill the murderer. Up till now they had not returned.

When doctors disagree. . . . Mr. Brower becomes a census taker.

When Jarvis came ashore, Pisa thought some one had told him about the killing, and that Jarvis was coming to get him. He was in the doorway of one of the igloos with his rifle, waiting to see what would happen. He said he would kill us both before he was taken. A boy had heard him and told Tom. That was the reason he headed us off and had us come straight to the big house.

Tom and Fred left in the morning with Jarvis on the *Bear*, and never told him about the shooting. Pisa had given some of his clothing the time we made a collection from the Eskimos, and Jarvis had a nice present for him, but the Eskimo was afraid to go after it. One of the best-pleased natives was Long John, the boy that gave his shirt to old Pete. He had a new rifle and cartridges for his extra services. John seemed proud to think he had not been forgotten. (Speaking of John, he is dying tonight, December 15th, 1927.) Jack Hadley and John Greubin, both of whom had been here with Tom, were the only white men that were with me this winter; they were both good men.

A native execution of the murderous Eskimo desperado, Pisa.

When the ice had made, the Eskimos who had gone east, to find if the story told of Pisa was true, returned with sleds; they had found the bodies of the eight people just as the woman had said. Then there was a big consultation as to what they should do with him. They finally decided that he must be killed, and the one to do the shooting was to be the brother of the first man killed. His name was Elebrah, the same as one of the murdered men.

Pisa was in one of my small houses all this time. His woman carried all his food in to him, and he sat all day and night in a berth with his rifle and his hunting knife by his side. While he slept, if he ever did, she kept watch outside the door. If any one asked about him, she always said he was sick.

Things came to a show-down early in November. One afternoon many of the men came to the station, saying they were going to get Pisa and take him away so Elebrah could shoot him. They hung around, without doing anything until after dark. I thought if anything was to be done, it was up to me. I told them if they would not take him away themselves, I would have to get him out somehow. No one around the station felt safe, not knowing whom Pisa would kill next. He threatened to shoot anyone that came to the house; and I think he would, if he had got the chance.

I told Jack if anything happened to me, he was to take charge. With a revolver, I started for the house, having decided that if Pisa made a move toward his gun, and I was quick enough, I would kill him. But just as I was about to enter the door of the house, some one landed on my back, pulling me backwards; then before I could make a move, he jumped through the door and landed like a cat on Pisa. Pulling him out of the bunk on the floor, he sat on him until several Eskimos came to help him. They tied Pisa hand and foot, lashing him to a small sled, and carried him across the lagoon.

The one that had jumped on me was a boy about seventeen. He had heard that I was going for Pisa; he was in the village, and ran all the way to the station just in time to prevent me from mixing in their own vendetta. It was a wonder neither of us were hurt, as I had the gun cocked in my coat pocket. Icpic was the name of the kid. He afterward told me that as the men did not seem to want to take a chance, he would, although the people killed were no relation to him.

As they were dragging Pisa off, he was calling to me to stop them. When I took no notice of him, he quieted and then said: "I'm a hunter—you'll never kill me with one bullet." And they did not; for though Elebrah shot the bound man as if he were a mad dog, it took two bullets to complete the work.

These leaves from Mr. Brower's notebook afford us intensely interesting glimpses into actual life in the Far North.

The Silver Trail

A fascinating story of the old Southwest by a man who knows it well—the gifted writer who gave us "Youth Rides Victorious" and "The Hazardous Highway."

By FREDERICK R. BECHDOLT

Illustrated by E. H. Kuhlhoff

Lant's hand dropped for his revolver —but Tom was upon him before his fingers closed on its butt.

IT happened to be a Thursday evening; and the Weekly *Free Press* was lying on the center-table when Tom Logan came home. He picked it up and ran his eye down through the half-dozen columns of small items which lay like an oasis, surrounded by a desert of dreary advertisements. Most of these latter were lists of cattle brands, and some exploited patent medicines. Of the news, the great majority pertained to small local happenings. But there was one story, two sticks in length, surmounted by a single-line head, which dealt with other things than church sociables and card-parties and the prospects of summer feed on the adjoining ranges.

"HORN SILVER!" so the heading ran. And because the phrase was alluring, Tom read the succeeding paragraphs. They told of a new strike in Arizona; of a dark outcrop where the arid hills leaked riches; of men made wealthy in a single hour; and men who followed the discoverers, taking their chances against thirst and Apaches, to seek more treasures which those sun-baked mountains held.

He did not think much of it at the time. And he had laid down the paper; his mind was on other matters, for when a young fellow has grown up into his early twenties taking such things as ease and security and good times for granted, the idea of precious metal does not set his hopes on fire. And as far as adventure was concerned, he was finding all he wanted, riding his father's horses, with the other young fellows who looked after his father's cattle.

If he had been more steady and less willful, he would have been following his father's wishes and learning the banking business—would have been, this last four or five years, in the little one-story bank on Front Street, with his nose close to a figure column. But he was, like many another son just come into manhood, somewhat of a disappointment.

So he was sitting here in the quiet living-room, when his mother came downstairs; and the moment he saw her face, he knew that something had happened—something that hurt. She came to him, laid her hand on his shoulder, and told him in but few words, for one does not need to waste time in breaking news to the young. Not knowing what pain means, they are as yet immune.

"The bank has closed its doors." She said it quietly; and it was only the look in her eyes that made him begin to realize that here was tragedy—for her at least, and for his father.

It was after she had taken him upstairs, and they were with his father, that the realization began to sink in. This morning, when Tom had seen him, he had been a big man, square-shouldered; and his face had, in its firmness, the suggestion of a face hewn from a block of granite. Now he was lying in the bed, with his knees doubled, so that the counterpane made a snowy mound over them, and his face was like a gourd that has with-

ered and wrinkled in the hot sun. And the eyes were like the eyes of one who has been struck and lies awaiting another blow, unflinching but helpless.

There was not much said, for there was little which could be said between them; these two gray-haired ones, and the young fellow who had always gone his own way.

"I don't care for myself," his father muttered, "but it's the other men. They trusted their money to me. And now—" His voice trailed off.

Afterward, when Tom had come downstairs with his mother, she told him:

"That's what's on his mind. The money he has lost for other men. He'll not get over it."

It was on the tip of Tom's tongue to remind her that no man can foresee a three-years' drouth and a drop of prices on top of it; but he held his peace, remembering his father's eyes, and he knew that she had spoken truly.

"No," he was thinking, "he'll not get over it. And she'll not get over it." And he had a sudden picture of the two of them, shrinking smaller through the months and years. And always that look in their eyes. And he remembered how little he had been to them, how he had always gone his own way, how he had always taken such things as money for granted. Now he was useless when extremity had come to them.

It was then that the little two-stick item in the *Free Press* came back to him. It came before him as he had read it an hour ago. He stood there for some moments, thinking.... If he was good for anything, he was good for that. And there was a chance—there was always a chance for the man willing to take the risk. *"Horn silver."* He said the words over to himself. Then he turned to his mother. "Do they give a man any time to pull out of these things?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Of course it will take a few months, less than a year, before the bank's affairs are wound up. And your father will try. But"—he heard her sob—"there's no place for him to turn."

"You mean, we'll lose our home?"

"He'll give it up, dear. It will break his heart, but he will do it."

Tom's lips went tight. "I'll get the money, Mother," he said quietly....

It was the next morning when he rode away. And for some reason which he could not understand, he had a feeling of great sureness. That was, of course, because he was young.

Three hundred miles to Arizona; and he did not know silver ore when he saw it. He had never done any harder work than to stick in the saddle for long hours. But youth is mighty in hope. And he had the knowledge that he was riding forth to save two hearts from breaking.

CHAPTER II

IT was late October when Tom rode away from the little town in the sage-brush country to the east. It was well along in August when he rode down the arroyo among

the sun-flayed hills of southeastern Arizona, which went—with good reason—by the name of Dead Man's Wash. Such changes as those ten months had brought to him did not include his fortunes. But the silent lands along the border had bestowed upon him a quiet hardness; and from following a hundred lures to a hundred barren ends, he had learned patience. The sureness which had been upon him when he set forth abided with him still; out of the silence and the hardships and the dangers, it had taken on a more enduring quality; it had become a faith—the deep faith that has led an unnamed army of wanderers into the passes of the mountains and across the long reaches of the deserts throughout the entire West.

And so this afternoon when he came on the bit of float, there was, as there had been so many times before—up in the pines which topped the distant Chiricahuas, among the clumps of bear-grass in the heights of the Dragoons—a sudden thrill of hope that this was to prove the great moment, that here was the sign which pointed to the end of the long trail.

The fragment lay among the myriad of sharp rocks in the bed of the dry wash, a triangular bit of stone, dull greenish black, half the size of Tom's palm. Here, where a tributary gulch came down to the main arroyo, the rubble had been heaped by the rush of some bygone freshet after a summer rain; the thorny ocatilla and sharp-spiked nigger-heads grew all about. Tom would never have seen the promise of buried riches if it had not been for a seven-foot rattlesnake which had coiled itself in the shade of a large boulder thirty feet away from it.

That was the way it came about. The snake buzzed and drew back its head to strike; the saddle-horse shied violently, and the lead horse pulled back. The rider found himself busy trying to keep his seat and handle the two animals; and by the time he had finished with these things, the cause of the alarm had crawled away. Searching for some sign of the reptile, Tom discovered the chunk of float, and leaning from the saddle, scooped it up. He looked at it. This was no ordinary ore.

"Horn silver." He said the two words in a hushed voice. He continued gazing at the dull black rock for some moments, then glanced round, seeking landmarks by which to remember the spot, and dropped the specimen in his pocket.

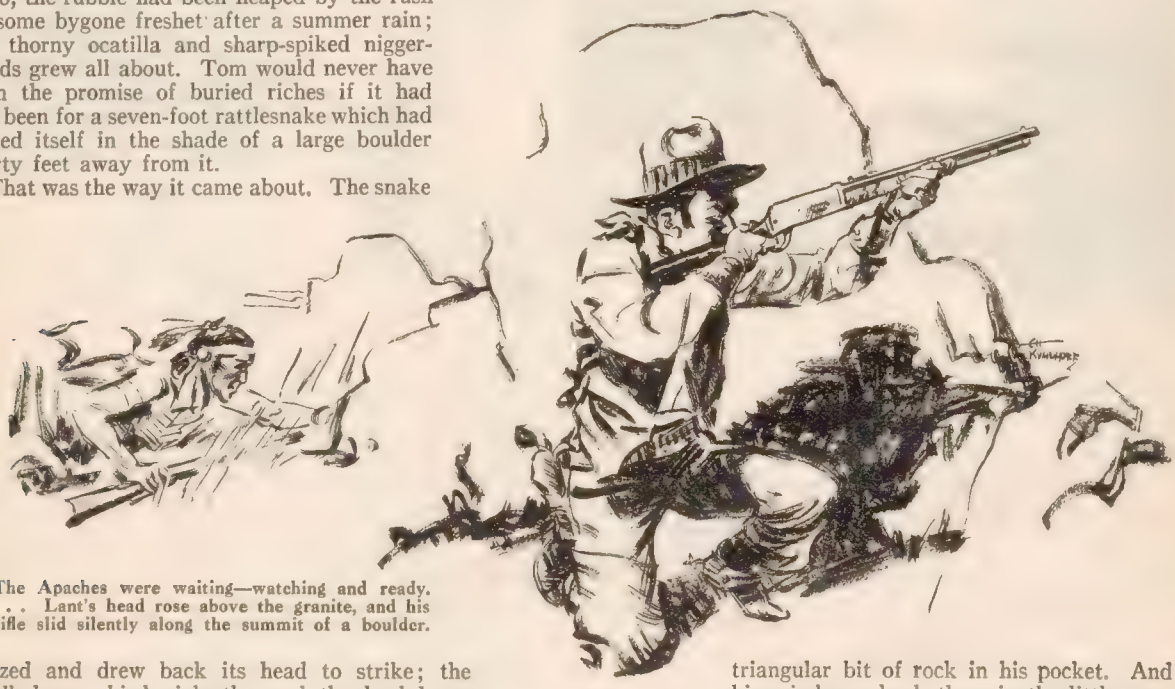
The outcropping whence it had come lay somewhere up the side gulch. No doubt about that. It might be a mere swindle, pinching down to nothing within a few feet of the surface. It might be a huge ledge.

He looked to the sun. The afternoon was already on the wane. And this was No Man's Land, where turbaned Apaches were forever riding through, and white renegades, as much to be dreaded as the dusky raiding parties.

A few miles farther on the wash came out into the valley, where a river showed, coffee-brown after hard rains, and sand flats furnished sustenance for whirling dust-devils at all other times. Not far from the mouth of the gulch was Agua Fria, where some Mexicans had dug a well with good success and built a half-dozen cube-shaped houses of adobe bricks. Last night, and two nights before that, he had lain in dry camps, guarding his horses from red marauders whose presence in the neighborhood had been made evident by smoke-signals. Tonight he needed sleep; and he who slept in this place would be very apt not to waken when morning came.

"I'll shove on to Agua Fria," he told himself, "and stop over with old Pedro Romandiaz. Then in the morning I'll come back and look for the ledge."

He touched his horse with the spur, and as he rode down the gulch among the spiked yuccas and the dagger plants and thorny ocatilla shrubs, his fingers touched that triangular bit of rock in his pocket. And his mind was back there in the little cow-town three hundred miles away. He was seeing his father's face, all shrunken and deeply lined; and now the lines were smoothing away; the light was strong again in the eyes where hopelessness had abided for so long; the bent shoulders were squaring back.



The Apaches were waiting—watching and ready. . . . Lant's head rose above the granite, and his rifle slid silently along the summit of a boulder.

"Maybe it will be this time," Tom whispered to himself as if it were a promise.

The sun was swinging toward the ragged summit of the purple mountains in the west when he came out into the flats and saw the hamlet of chocolate-colored cubes ahead of him; and off to the south, where the valley flats reached toward spectral ranges down in Mexico, the slender dust-signal which marked the approach of another traveler, several hours more distant than himself. This he noted, as a man does such things in a country where he who would survive must let no facts pass without tak-

ing due account of them—a land where the question of life or death may hinge on smaller discoveries than a wisp of brown dust in the distance.

Ordinarily there was little of life to show itself to passing travelers in Agua Fria, and this afternoon that little had diminished to half a dozen prowling dogs. The flat-roofed adobes remained silent, and the sandy space between them which served as street and plaza was still empty of human beings when Tom had put up his horses in the little corral made of ocatilla stems planted in the ground. He came forth from the pen to discover an open doorway in the last house, and in the doorway a girl.

It was Chiquita, the daughter of old Pedro Romandiaz, and Tom's eyes brightened with the joy of looking on her as she stood there in her coarse slip of a dress; for her skin glowed like gold in the sunshine, and her eyes were like two dark pools in whose depths the light was sleeping. He saw the white little teeth revealed in a swift smile, and he knew she had remembered him.

"We said you would be riding back some day, my father and I," she told him. "Come in. You are well, yes? And the Apaches did not get you. You will be hungry now." He shook his head.

"That will wait for the meal-time, Chiquita," he answered in the mongrel Spanish of the border. "But tired, yes. And I can sleep till sundown."

While he was talking, old Pedro Romandiaz came into the room, the shadow of a man, fragile with the years but upright still.

"It is good to see you, my friend," he said. "And on this day it is thrice good. For of those left I am the only able-bodied man. The others went across the line before the dawn. You understand, there is a pack-train coming from the south, and they wait for them in the pass, to guard for fear of ambush by bandits."

He hurried stiffly across the room and got a bottle from a cupboard. When he had placed it on the table of hewn boards tied with rawhide, he made one of those brief gestures in which the dark-skinned races are so adept.

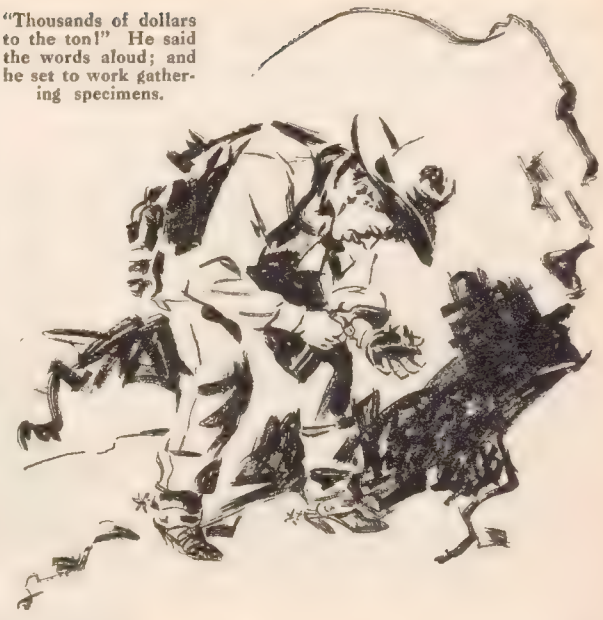
"You are tired. And this mescal is the best."

"It is the sleep I need," Tom told him. And the two of them showed him to a cool back room where he flung himself upon the pallet bed on the earthen floor when they had left; and within a few minutes he was fast asleep.

WHILE he slept, the dust-wreath in the south came nearer, and the rider within the brown cloud saw the little flat-topped houses of Agua Fria with the heat-waves shimmering around them on the mesa above the river flats. A man of ordinary build, with blue eyes whose color was as cold as painted porcelain, with a bad mouth, with a stubble of beard on his thick jaw, and with reddened lids from looking long into the sun. His horse was gaunt and weak. And he was weary in the saddle. The name by which men knew him now was Lant.

Down in the south whence he had come, four others of his sort had been with him. Two of these were now food for buzzards, and the remaining pair were, like himself, in full flight to Tucson. Last week, they had all four been doing well, scalp-hunting for a local *jefe*. For the Apaches had been raiding much of late, and these five had brought in many dripping trophies, each of which had got good bounty. Until some one had discovered that the lank black hair on the scalps was not all that of the marauding Apaches! And now Lant was riding, as hard as his poor mount could carry him, to the northward, and Agua Fria showed before him. His reddened eyes grew ugly with suddenly aroused desire. Desire for food and water, and then—

"Ort to be a good hoss there," he told himself; "and



"Thousands of dollars to the ton!" He said the words aloud; and he set to work gathering specimens.

only greasers to handle." He spurred his jaded mount, and his dry lips curled unpleasantly. For after what had come and gone down there in the south, the idea of despoiling Mexicans held a strong appeal to him. And he had failed to mark the dust-cloud which had signaled Tom Logan's arrival in the hamlet from the north.

So he came on, and the afternoon was on the wane when he stood before the door of Pedro Romandiaz. If he had taken as much thought for his horse as his predecessor had, he would have learned more of conditions; but he had left the animal to stand foodless and unwatered in the dusty street; and so he still cherished the belief that he was the only American about the place. He saw before him a room with earthen floor and whitewashed walls; within the room an old man and a girl whose dark eyes filled with fear as they met his; and on the rude table a bottle of mescal. To him, just then, no combination could have been more alluring. He let his gaze rest on it for a moment, and he licked his dry lips. And then, by way of greeting:

"Bring me something to eat, you two," he said. And finding them a little slow in their response, added an oath that made the girl's cheeks flame and the eyes of the old man flash. The latter started toward the door which led toward the rear room where Tom was sleeping. Lant shook his head.

"Oh, no, *hombre*." He pointed toward the open kitchen door. "Now, *pronto*, and don't you try to slip out on me!"

He sat down at the table, and his cold blue eyes moved under the reddened lids following them while they hurried to do his bidding. As yet neither of them had spoken. They remained silent, regarding each other with sidelong frightened glances, while he devoured the *chili con carne* and the beans which they had set before him. Occasionally he drank from the bottle on the table; and as the food warmed him and the fervent liquor coursed through his veins, he grew more satisfied with himself. With the satisfaction there came over him a change which made the color leave the girl's cheeks.

There was something very much to his taste in this silence of theirs, in the fear which he read in their faces. He let his hand drop to the big butt of his revolver in its holster, and he saw Chiquita flinch. He smiled, and

drank once more from the mescal bottle. For the moment Mexico was forgotten, and the terror of death's imminence down there across the line. He had ceased to feel the punishment of long riding. His weariness was gone. He beckoned to Chiquita.

"Clear off them dishes," he said in the English; his tongue was getting a little thick, but she understood the gesture. She had taken a plate from the table and was reaching for another, and his eyes were lingering on the bare arm, where the loose sleeve had fallen back to the dimpled elbow, close by him. His breath came hard, and his eyes had a look in them that made the girl draw away. He stretched forth his arm and seized her about her slender waist. He dragged her down to his lap; and old Pedro Romandiaz uttered a broken cry and started toward him. It was then that Chiquita made the first sound since Lant had shown himself in the doorway.

The walls were thick and the doors were of heavy hewn planks, and Tom Logan was sleeping deeply in the coolness of the rear room; but the girl's piercing cry of terror brought him to his feet in a single leap.

He was halfway to the bare front room before he remembered that when he had lain down he had unbuckled his cartridge belt and left his holstered revolver upon the floor beside the pallet. Now he did not delay to go back for the weapon, but went on and flung the door open.

Pedro Romandiaz was lying on his back, the blood from Lant's blow red upon his face. And Lant was standing wide-footedly with his arms about Chiquita, when he heard the bang of the heavy door against the wall and saw Tom upon the threshold.

His hand dropped for his revolver, and he spurned the girl with a force that sent her spinning to the opposite wall. But her presence had hampered the movement toward the weapon, and Tom was upon him before his fingers closed on its butt.

OF that fight there was but little. At its beginning Pedro Romandiaz was getting to his feet. And when he stood upright, it was all over. During the brief time that intervened, Tom's fist had swung to the unshaven jaw and Lant had gone down, still groping for his gun. It was Tom's booted foot that sent the weapon rattling on the hard earth away from the owner's grasp. And before the old man had fairly recovered his shaken senses, Lant was out in the open, and Logan was standing in the doorway with the captured pistol in his hand, saying quietly:

"Just keep on moving—and don't reach for that rifle, mind."

So Lant rode away up the little street between the cubical mud-colored houses, with the dogs snarling at the heels of his decrepit horse, conscious of that other watching him from the doorway, and therefore taking good care to keep his right hand well aloof from the butt of the rifle in the leather sheath beneath his stirrup leather.

Passing the corral at the north end of the hamlet, he saw Tom's two animals feeding within the little pen of ocatilla boughs.

His eyes hung on the animals, and the ugly line between his brows grew deeper as they lingered. Good horses both. He saw the saddle and the pack near by.

"Prospector's outfit," he told himself. "And he'll be pullin' out in the morning. Aint no reason why I couldn't be on hand then. An' play even."

CHAPTER III

THERE was, as Lant had told himself, no reason why he should not be on hand for ambush and murder in the morning. But in the hour of the sunset when the ragged peaks to the westward were turning dark purple, and the long flats were pulsating in the fading light, there came a change to Agua Fria. The pack-train from south of the line arrived, with the able-bodied men of the hamlet who had gone forth to guard the pass against marauding bandits.

Down in the sand flats by the river-bed where Lant had made his sorry camp the grass was scant; up there by the corral, where the small tradesmen from half a dozen Sonora villages were gathered by their twinkling fires, there was good food for horse and man. So Lant crept forth and joined the swarthy groups. The members of these groups were seasoned hands in No Man's Land, well armed and willing to use their weapons. Wherefore the visitor chose discretion; and by his choice he got along so well that he and his horse both filled their bellies. The dark-skinned riders from the south were cheerful over their safe passage through the first stage of their journey to Silver City, where they did their trading; and the mescal bottles were passed around the dying fires—with the result that Lant did not awaken until the hot bite of the morning sun was upon his face. Then he opened his eyes to the realization that he had missed his opportunity.

For of Tom Logan and his horses there remained only some faint hoofmarks, leading off into the north. These and the pack-horse, which was picking at stray bits of hay in the corral of ocatilla boughs. It was the presence of the animal which gave Lant a new idea.

"Which," he told himself, "would mean he aint gone far. Aiming to be back by night. Mebbe it's better the way it is. For it's the saddle-hoss I want; and if I foller that trail out into the hills—why, then they'll think Apaches done the killin'."

So, before his departure, he took care to let it be known that he was setting forth for Tucson. And after that, he hung to the regular road long enough to leave his horse's tracks as evidence of good faith. All of which took some time, and it was nearing noon before he struck across the country looking for Tom's trail. The sun had passed the meridian for a good two hours before he found it leading up the main gulch.

A wiser man than Lant would have abandoned the project long before this time; but there was more than the desire for the good horse to hold him to his quest. The memory of yesterday afternoon's affair rankled in him, and he was one of those with whom the longing to kill is a bone-gripping passion. So, where another would have been on the road to Tucson and comfort, he was here in the blazing sunshine scanning the glaring rocks of the dry wash, reading the signs which they betrayed of the man he sought.

It was slow work, for his progress was always hampered by the imminence of complications. There was no moment when the next turn of the arroyo might not disclose his quarry; and he knew from smarting experience that this one would, in all likelihood, be extremely quick to meet the situation. Wherefore he was obliged, at intervals, to leave the faint trail which he was following, and climb to the nearest vantage-point whence he could view the land ahead, lest he find himself walking into ambush.

The hot afternoon wore on. The glaring sun looked down upon the arid landscape, where two men were like dots, creeping slowly onward; the one along a trail of little rock fragments, which sometimes showed a half dozen at a time, and sometimes vanished for long intervals; the other hanging to this one's tracks.

And while these two dots moved on, with the space between them growing smaller every hour, other specks appeared upon the sun-flayed landscape. There were twenty of them, and they were coming from the east. And as they traveled down the main arroyo the afternoon grew old. Evening was drawing near.

A band of Chiricahua Apaches these were, crossing from mountains in the east to seek the flanks of the western range beyond the valley and make their camp before darkness overtook them. Their brown bodies jogged to the movement of their horses; the dusty filets which bound their frowsy heads bobbed up and down in the sun-glare. Now and again, as the main body passed along the bed of the gulch, an outrider appeared somewhere ahead, skylined upon an eminence where he spied out the land about them.

Long before this time one of the pair of dots ahead of them had ceased to move on. Here in the tributary gulch, Tom Logan stood confronted by the fulfillment of the promise which that triangular chunk of ore had held forth to him the day before. A streak of rock, looking as black as ink in places and in other places showing filaments of green, it lay near the foot of the flanking hill, and the fragments which had broken away from it strewed the bottom of the ravine.

Nearby there was a patch of gramma grass, knee high. His horse fell to grazing on the good feed. Tom was at work with the short-handled prospector's pick. The perspiration soaked through his heavy woolen shirt. He toiled on, unmindful of the heat, unmindful of all other matters save that ledge of horn silver. And as he removed the rubble of loose rock which masked it, he began to see the outcropping's full extent.

He measured it with his eye and drew a deep breath; he picked up a bit of the rich ore and fingered it, as if to make sure that it was real. There was no need for assay to prove its richness; it was so soft that he could have cut it with his pocket knife.

"Thousands of dollars to the ton!" He said the words aloud, and dashed the perspiration from his brow with his sleeve. There it lay before him, a good six feet in thickness, clearly defined—one of those ledges which prospectors dream about.

"Big as the Comstock," he whispered. Then he set to work gathering specimens from the face of the outcropping, and when he had filled a little canvas sack with them, he noticed for the first time that it was getting late. He had been working here for hours, unmindful of all things but that thick seam of precious ore. He cast a swift glance round him. And the joy of his discovery was replaced by the thrill that comes to a man who sees his life in danger.

It was a little thing that brought that knowledge. A tuft of bear-grass, moving where there was no wind. Something—or was it some one?—had caused that stirring on the hillside. He looked more closely and caught the flutter of dusty white cloth where the free ends of the Apache's turban dangled beyond the knot. Then, when another and less seasoned hand would have invited death by sudden flight, he remained quiet for a moment, before he started slowly toward the nearest cover.

It seemed to him like many minutes while he crossed the interval of bare ground, until he had a large cluster of boulders, which he had marked, within leaping distance. If the savages had suspected him, they would have fired at once. He told himself this half a dozen times, while he was sauntering toward his shelter. To get behind those rocks—and then make for his horse! And the animal was a good hundred feet away, with his rifle in the sheath beneath the stirrup-leather.

Twenty pairs of beady black eyes were watching him from behind the clumps of bear-grass and the rocks. A score of naked brown warriors were lying flat on their bellies, every one of them with his weapon ready at his side. They had been a long time at it, ever since one of the outriders had spied their quarry up here in the side gulch. A long time since they had left their ponies and begun this slow creeping onward, closing in. And now they were almost ready—

But there was another who had been coming on with caution almost as great as theirs. Lant's horse was grazing where he had left it behind a round hill of boulders. And Lant was creeping on his hands and knees up the rock-strewn flank of another of those naked buttes. He gained the summit; and as he looked through a narrow crevice between two huge lumps of granite, he saw Tom in the gully's bed, less than two hundred yards away.

Lant cocked his rifle—thrust the butt against his shoulder. And as he did this, Tom took another step toward the cover which he had chosen. The movement carried him out of Lant's sight.

The Apaches had ceased their creeping now. They were waiting, watching the white man. . . . Waiting and ready.

And then Lant raised himself upon his knees. His head rose above the granite rock, and his rifle slid silently along the summit of the boulder. Tom was visible again. The barrel came to a rest, and the cold blue eyes of the owner found the rear sight; they traveled to the front sight.

But as the two sights lined, there came between them and the mark down in the gully a moving form. And the cold sweat of fear filmed Lant's forehead in that instant.

For he was looking into the beady eyes of an Apache warrior less than fifty feet away. And with the discovery there came to him the knowledge that the flank of the hill before him was sprinkled with naked savages. He had climbed one slope while they were creeping along the other. It seemed to him as if the rocks had turned of a sudden into Indians.

The thing that he did then was the wisest thing he could have done, but there was no thought behind it. It was the involuntary action of a man stricken by terror. His finger squeezed down on the trigger without his knowing it; and the sound of his rifle caught him as much by surprise as it did the enemies below him. He pumped another cartridge into the chamber—and this time he knew what he was about. He fired his second shot at the nearest thatch of frowsy hair, and fled as fast as his feet could carry him down the hill's rear slope. And the hot air of the waning afternoon was shivering to the rattle of shots behind him as he sought his horse. But those shots went wild; the reports of his rifle had smitten the Apaches with bewilderment.

To Tom, the sound of the first shot was as a signal, and he leaped behind the rocks. And while the volley that followed was echoing on the hillsides, he ran, bent low

"If you don't find some hay right sudden," Tom told him, "I'm going to finish one job that the Apaches didn't tend to!"

to keep within the shelter of those boulders, to his own animal. It occurred to him long afterward, when he had gained the saddle and was spurring off on the dead run, how he had failed to hear the buzz of slugs about his ears, and he wondered what the reason was.

While Tom rode hard across the bare hills toward the valley and Agua Fria, the naked warriors, who had been putting in a good hour at getting within range of him, were beginning to realize that the reinforcements which they thought had stolen up behind them consisted of only one man. But this one too had gained his horse, and their ponies were some distance away. Before they were mounted, Lant was spurring out of sight. They followed him a mile or so, and gave it up as a bad job.

That evening, as darkness was coming on, Tom rode into Agua Fria, where he told to old Pedro Romandiaz the story of his escape.

"What I can't understand," he added when the tale was completed, "was their missing me at that close range. Even for Apaches, that was bad shooting."

"And now," the old man asked, "you will be going out again into these hills?"

"No," Tom told him. "I'll be riding on to Tucson in the morning. It looks like I'd struck it this time." He went on to confide the news of his discovery, while Chiquita stood behind his chair, listening wide-eyed.

"In this country," her father said, "to find a ledge is one thing, my friend; to hold it is another."

"I've got the men to help me hold it, all right," Tom answered surely. "Two of them, friends of mine, and both good men. All we need now is money to back us, while we develop it. And I know where we can get that. You've heard of Sam Gates?"

"Who has not heard of him?" The old man shrugged his shoulders. "He is what you call a big man in Arizona."

"He's looking for silver now," Tom said. "He's grubstaked half a dozen outfits. When we show him these samples, he'll throw in with us, all right."

Pedro Romandiaz laid his lean old hand on the younger man's and said warningly:

"These big men, my friend, they are all the same. When you do the business with Sam Gates, keep your eyes open."

But he saw that Tom was not listening, and he shook his head a little sadly.

The dawn of the next day was barely broken when Tom set forth on the Tucson road. Within an hour after his departure Lant was leaving the spot where night had overtaken him in his flight among the great bare hills. And luck so arranged matters that his route took him near the scene of last evening's close escape from the Apaches in the side gulch. Then he remembered something that he had seen in those moments while he was about to line his sights on his intended victim, and he rode up the bed of the gully to have a closer look at the place.

So it came about that when the morning was growing on toward noon, he too was journeying on the Tucson road, carrying with him a sack of fragments picked from the surface of that outcropping of rich ore.

CHAPTER IV

A WEEK had gone by since that brush with the Apaches. It was a summer evening, and there was no moon; but the great white stars blazed in the dark velvet sky, shedding a faint light over the flat roofs and the narrow streets of Tucson. Not far from the wall of adobe, which had served in other years to defend the town against marauding Apaches, the church of San Augustine stood, fronting an open square. On the steps of the old building a man was standing; if you had caught sight of him, you would have said that he was lurking there, for there was that in his manner of hugging the wall which suggested stealth. And when a passer-by crossed the open square, he drew back into the shadow. A man with a black beard; and his eyes were always on the establishment of Vicente Alvarez. It was directly across the plaza, a one-story cube of sun-baked bricks; and the light that leaked around the window shade was the only sign of life within.

And while the watcher on the church steps waited, there was another standing vigil inside. There were two rooms; one where the customers were served with Mexican food and—to wash this down—their choice of an indifferent wine or the fiery mescal; the other where the Señora Alvarez cooked the tamales and the *con carne* and the chili beans. In this latter she was standing now, a gross lump of a woman, dark as a cake of chocolate; and her small eyes were glittering like two flakes of obsidian in the candlelight, as she bided just inside the connecting doorway, where she could hear all that was being said in the outer room. Watching those gleaming eyes of hers, her husband, whose only purpose in the establishment was

the bestowal of his name and the doing of her bidding, lounged in silence at the kitchen's farther end.

Of guests there were two in the outer room. And from their appearance one would have been justified in the belief that they were up to some sort of dangerous conspiracy. For while they talked, they leaned across the table so that their heads were close together, and their voices seldom rose above an undertone. At times they sank to a whisper, and the eavesdropper beyond the threshold had to cup her hand to her ear—often then without success.

If you had guessed that these two were conspiring, you would have come somewhere near the truth; for when men are planning an expedition to a spot where large treasure is waiting for the first discoverer who happens along, and when, moreover, that spot is in a lonely land where hard-eyed riders go with rifles slung to their saddles and big revolvers dangling beside their thighs, the preparations must be carried out with very much the same degree of caution as if the matter in hand were a major crime.

So on this summer evening Tom Logan sat with one of those good friends whom he had been looking forward to finding in Tucson; and the faces of both men were drawn, for it had begun to come to them that it was barely possible there might be trouble in store for them before they reached that ledge of precious ore out in the sun-baked hills along the border.

"Just what is up, I do not know." The friend was speaking. Tuttle was his name. Like Tom, he was young, and he also was seasoned in the hard Southwest, although he did not look it, for he was inclined toward roundness—one of those men whose bold alertness is hidden under much flesh. He lowered his voice:

"But this I'm sure of: We stand a chance of being double-crossed."

"Two thousand dollars to the ton," Tom sighed, "and this fellow Gates backs down on us! Reckon he thinks we're trying to swindle him?"

The other shook his head. "Not him. Sam Gates knows me better than that. No. He's the one that's figuring on the swindle, if anybody is. But what he's up to, I can't understand." His round face was eloquent of bewilderment. "I gave him specimens, and he had an assay made. It ran higher than our own. Some went twenty-five hundred to the ton. And everything was O. K. He promised the grubstakes and plenty of backing. What's more, I know he is looking for just such a proposition. His Silver City properties are nearly worked out. First thing that made me suspicious was when he began to avoid me, two days ago. And this afternoon, when I went to him, he said the deal was off."

"Leaving us flat," Tom swore.

"Mebbe he thinks he's leaving us flat," Tuttle said quietly, "but if he does, he's wrong. My idea is he's got something up his sleeve. Some of those big men are playing both ends against the middle; that's the way they get rich. But anyhow, he's not left us flat. When he turned me down this afternoon, I got busy myself and sold out my share in the freight outfit. So we got our grubstake. Not as big as Gates would furnish us, but it's enough to go on. And I didn't stop at that. I bought the outfit, animals and all. It's down at Leatherwood's corral."

One of the hardest things a man faces is the task of thanking a friend. Tom found himself, for the moment, inarticulate. Seeing the look in his face, Tuttle smiled.

"After all," said he, "we're that much richer—nobody to divide up with. Only us three. But what's worrying me is why Gates backed out on us. Couldn't be that he's got some information of his own about that outcropping and where it lies?"

"Well, he'd have to get it from some of those Apaches if he did," Tom said. "Not much chance of that. What's keeping Jess? I wish he'd show up."

"Don't worry about Jess," Tuttle told him. "He's looking out for us. I saw him this afternoon and gave him the news. Chances are, he's run onto some information of his own. Jesse is an old-timer in this mining game."

"Just the same," Tom declared fretfully, "I wish he'd come. I'll feel easier when the three of us are shut of this town. Too many tinhorns here to watch a man, and not a one of 'em but would cut your throat for the chance of half of what we've got ahead of us. You know, Ed, I've heard of more'n one stampede where the discoverer finished up to find somebody else holding down his claim. And this ledge of mine's uncovered. I never had a chance to hide the outcropping when those Apaches jumped me. It sticks up like a sore thumb."

"Well,"—Tuttle nodded reassuringly,—"we'll be on our way tomorrow or next day. And here's Jess now."

They could see at the first glance that he had brought bad news. A tall man, and his shoulders drooped a little with the years. He closed the street door behind him, and he came slowly to the table; stroking his heavy gray mustache. His lean sunburned features were without sign of emotion, but there was a light in the gray eyes that told of trouble in the offing. The other two watched him in silence until he had pulled up his chair to the little table. Tom was the first to speak.

"Well?" And by way of answer, Jess nodded.

"Reckon you boys can make ready, so's we pull out tonight?"

It was then that the Señora Alvarez slipped away from her post within the kitchen doorway to whisper a word to her waiting husband, who departed on tiptoe by the rear entrance.

"You've run onto some news," Tuttle announced quietly. The older man settled down into his chair.

"If you fellows don't mind, I'm going to have a bite to eat before I start. I never did like the idee of ridin' on an empty belly." He raised his voice: "Señora, *chile con,* and *pronto.*"

She brought the steaming dish and laid it on the table before him, while the other two chafed in silence; and when she had departed, bestowing a childlike smile on all three of them, Jess told them his story between mouthfuls.

"I'll begin with last night, which was when I ought to have kep' my own eyes wider open. I don't know whether you two remember it, but there was a man standing on the old church steps when we was leaving this place. I happened to take notice of him. Feller with a black beard, and he kep' to the shadow when we went by. Well, when you spoke to me this afternoon, Ed, that came back to my mind. And a little later on,—I'd gone to Sam Gates' office jest to see what I could see,—here was this same party. I got sight of him through the window from the street. Which was enough for me, of course."

He devoted himself to the dish of *chile* for some moments before resuming.

"Puttin' two an' two together, I figgered on the assay

office as a good bet, and I made a visit there next. But I had to wait. For there was only one man that I could talk to there, and he was not about. It was late when he came back, and I got my information off of him. He says that three parties brought in some samples of silver ore and had 'em tested. And one of 'em was my man on the church steps—same feller, black beard and all. The other two was hard cases, from the looks of 'em. But —here's what made me know that we have been double-crossed—that ore is the same as your ore, Tom. Aint a doubt of it. It's off your ledge."

"It can't be," Tom cried.

"Well," Jess said grimly, "it is. And what's more, Sam Gates paid the bill for the assay. So there you are."

"Tom," Tuttle asked, "did you talk to anybody down there?"

"Didn't open my mouth to a soul—" Tom checked himself abruptly; and then: "There was," he added slowly, "Pedro Romandiaz and his girl Chiquita. They know."

"Greasers!" Jess spat the word from his lips as if it were unclean.

"I'd swear by those two," Tom cried. "I've known 'em a long time."

"When you know as much as me of greasers," Jess told him quietly, "you'll not swear by any of that breed. And one thing is sure. Sam Gates has been playing us three again' the other bunch. And he's throwed in with them, and they're a hard crowd. And there's one thing more: when I came by the church, my man with the black whiskers was there again."

The other two got up from their chairs and went to the window. They pulled aside the shade; but the square, as far as they could see, was empty.

"Done pulled his freight," Jess said when they returned. "And it is time we're doing the same. You say you got the hosses and outfit, Ed?"

"Down at Leatherwood's corral," Tuttle told him.

"Better we meet there within the hour," Tom was speaking. They nodded.

The Señor Alvarez waddled in at their call, and Tuttle paid the bill. She thanked him with the warmth of one who has good reason for gratitude, and bowed them out. And while they were crossing the little plaza before the old church, they looked again for some sign of the man of whom Jess had spoken.

There was no sign of him at all. Only one living creature showed besides themselves—Vicente Alvarez, slouching across the square. He gave them good-evening with the customary God's blessing when they passed him; and after they had gone, he fingered the big round Mexican dollars in his pocket which had not been there before his departure from the restaurant.

Separating, a little farther on, to seek their various rooming-places, the three partners had a final word, and old Jess was the last to speak,

"Keep your eyes open, son," he told Tom. "There's heaps of dark corners in these streets. And if we'd happen to lose you, we'd never find that ledge."

CHAPTER V

TOM'S saddle-horse and most of his equipment were in Leatherwood's corral, where nearly every traveler sojourning in Tucson in those days kept his animals. His lodgings were at the other end of the town, and they contained nothing of any particular consequence—which was just as well, as matters turned out, for he never did reach his room that evening; nor did he see it for long after.

If he had taken more thought of that warning which Jess had given him at their parting near the old church, he might have discovered the presence of danger long before he did; but when a man is in his twenties and has spent the years of his manhood in the wild border country, he is as likely as not to take such things rather lightly; and Tom had something else on his mind.

Some one had discovered that ledge of his. The gravity of the situation which arose from that discovery was not troubling him so sorely as the possibility of treachery. And if there had been treachery, there seemed to be only one possible traitor—Pedro Romandiaz. The words of his two companions back in the eating-house still rankled in his mind. He had been hot in his defense of the old man and his daughter. It had seemed beyond belief that they could have betrayed his secret. It still seemed so. And yet he knew that his faith in them was born of the mere fact of his friendship. And there was one fact which loomed large and black—they were the only ones to whom he had talked. Who else could know?

So he was walking through the silent streets between the flat-roofed adobe houses, with this to trouble him, arguing the matter over and over with himself, and he took but little pains to look ahead of him; he never looked behind.

Wherefore it came about that Vicente Alvarez, who had waited for the other two to get out of sight before he took his own departure from the little plaza by the church of San Augustine, was able to regain sight of Tom and to follow him, sometimes a square behind, and sometimes within half that distance, without the least danger of being seen. And when his quarry had gone a full half-mile and was nearing the house where he had his room, the shadow quickened his pace. He was coming on at a dog-trot when Tom heard the footsteps and turned, his hand upon his revolver butt.

NOW, Vicente owned some of his wife's largeness of girth, and for that reason it did not need much running to put him out of breath. There was but little simulation in his manner when he stood before Tom, gasping and all but inarticulate. And a far poorer actor than he would have gained the full confidence of his listener just then, for the latter was still wrestling with his troubles, and none too quick to come back to the things about him.

"Well,"—Tom frowned upon the eating-house proprietor,—"what's up, to bring you here?"

"It is—" Vicente put his hand upon his plump side and wheezed for some moments before going on. "It is your frien's. They 'ave send me to tell you—" He paused as if for breath once more. "They say to tell you sometheeng is 'appen. You mus' come now."

"Come now? You mean to the corral?"

"No. No, señor. Not the corral. You mus' not go there. Ees the word I am to breeng you, you mus' come queek. An' the place, she ees not the corral. Ees the Gem Saloon."

"The Gem Saloon?" Tom looked more closely at the dark face. But Vicente Alvarez was too good a liar to flinch now. And there was no suspicion in that scrutiny—only surprise.

"That's where 'e says. The Señor Jess." Vicente gazed blandly into the young man's eyes.

"That's queer." Tom shook his head. The place which the man had named was of none too good repute, an out-of-the-way establishment at one end of Myers Street, where troopers from the post bought cheap whisky just after pay-day. It occurred to him then that whatever had happened, it must have been serious to bring this messenger on the run, with such an appointment as this.

"How come," he asked sharply, "they sent you? Anybody with them?"

"Me, I donno." Vicente shook his head. "W'en you 'ave gone, han' I am back weeth my wife, they come to the door, the two of them, your frien's; an' they say I shall go an' fin' you an' tell you thees."

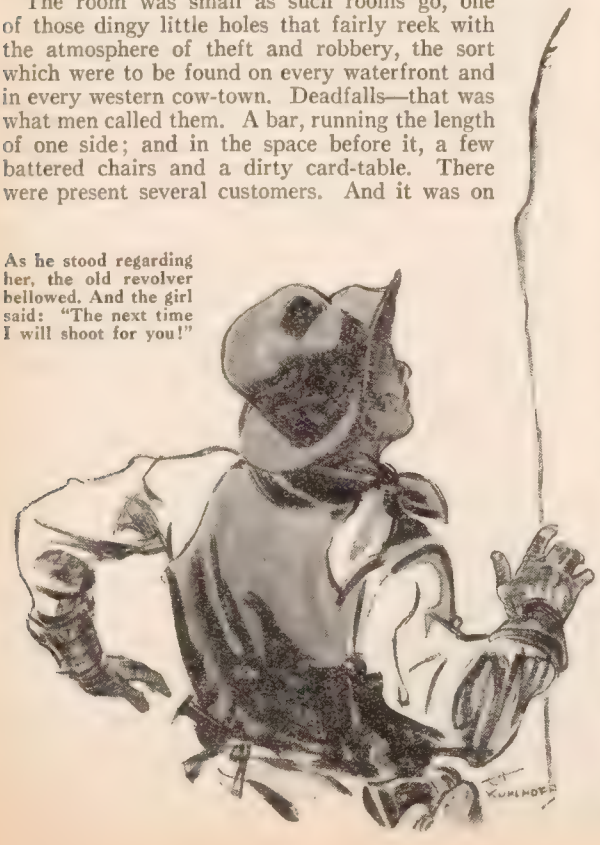
"All right." Tom turned and started back down the street; and the other made no effort now to keep up with him. His work was done.

"Funny," Tom was thinking, "they sent him! Why didn't one of them come?" And then he told himself that he would find the answer when he reached the rendezvous. As to what that answer really was to be, he had not as yet the most remote suspicion.

SO he hurried on to Myers Street, where the lights still burned, although the evening was well along. There were half a dozen saloons and gambling-houses, all well known and all still crowded with customers. And any one of them would have been a natural place to meet a friend. Evidently this appointment, which had developed so suddenly, demanded secrecy. A premonition of something gone wrong came to him as he passed down the crooked thoroughfare. That was as near as he got to the truth until he entered the Gem Saloon.

It was a one-story building, like all the others in the place, of adobe bricks, and it stood on a corner—the last establishment on the street, with a scattering of little huts beyond it, where Mexicans and a few Papago Indians lived among the cactus and the maguey on the outskirts of the town. The usual pair of low swinging doors gave entrance; and a flood of light gushed over them into the dusty roadway. Tom pushed his way through them; and when they swung shut behind him—he knew that he had walked into a trap.

The room was small as such rooms go, one of those dingy little holes that fairly reek with the atmosphere of theft and robbery, the sort which were to be found on every waterfront and in every western cow-town. Deadfalls—that was what men called them. A bar, running the length of one side; and in the space before it, a few battered chairs and a dirty card-table. There were present several customers. And it was on



As he stood regarding her, the old revolver bellowed. And the girl said: "The next time I will shoot for you!"

three of these that Tom's eyes fell, when he stood within those swinging doors.

Three of them, sitting together, near the entrance; and all it needed was one brief look to make the most casual observer certain of their hardness. One was a man with a black beard.

It was that beard, and the memory it brought of what Jess had said of the spy on the church steps, which awakened Tom to a sudden cold alertness. And as he glanced at them, he saw how the owner of the beard nodded to his two companions. By this time he had taken a second step into the room. He halted then. And the pair who had received that nod rose from their chairs. They went on out, and the swinging doors swung shut behind them.

The man with the beard sat looking straight ahead of him. The rest of the customers in the room had fallen silent, as if they felt the sudden tightening of the atmosphere. Tom went on to the bar. He was thinking fast now.

The situation was so old—so common in this land where death by violence solved many awkward problems—that he could only wonder at his blindness in walking into it. The stereotyped manner of ambush: where the victim walks out from the swinging doors, with the light upon him, where the killers lurk in the darkness of the roadway. All that it needed for completion, now, was for him to ask after his companions at the bar; and finding they had not come, to wait for their arrival. Then, with their failure to arrive, he would go forth—into the darkness to sudden death.

So he was thinking; and his eyes roved around the room. There was a rear door. As he noted the fact, the man with the beard got up, walked to the back of the room and took his stand beside that route to safety.

A man's mind acts curiously in such moments of stress. Tom's was striving for the moment to assure him that, after all, this might be the mere conjunction of appearances, that perhaps there might be nothing wrong. And while he was thinking along this line, it came to him suddenly how Vicente Alvarez had no reason for knowing where he roomed. For neither Jess nor Ed Tuttle knew the place.

This being the case, it was patent that the swarthy eating-house proprietor could have overtaken him only by following him from the beginning.

So, if he had needed proof, why here it was. And for the proof there was no need. Those two who had

slipped out into the street were enough—they and the man at the rear door.

He had walked into it. And the men who had planned this thing had but to carry it through. Jess and Tuttle would come to the corral; they were probably on their way there now. And they would wait a long, long time, to find at last that their guide had let himself get killed, leaving the location of that outcropping a secret as far as they were concerned. And the man who had done the killing would start out—perhaps within the hour—to seize the ore that he had found.

He was standing midway down the bar; there were perhaps five yards between him and the rear door, where the black-bearded guard was waiting. Tom could see the bulge of the six-shooter beneath the latter's coat. Then he made up his mind.

To act at once, and swiftly, before they guessed that he was ready, and when he had caught them by surprise, to carry through his purpose without a halt—it was his only chance; and it was none too good a chance at that. He turned his back upon the room, and nodded to the bartender.

"I'm looking for two friends of mine; I was to meet them here." He went on to describe them.

"Nobody like that showed up yet." The man was smiling, as one who watches the process of a good joke.

"All right. I'll wait." Tom faced around and addressed the room in general: "Have something, men?"

The three customers, who had been the audience thus far, rose from their places at the card-table, and while they were coming to the bar, Tom edged down to the counter's end. The man with the beard remained before the door; his back was toward it, and he faced the room. It was not until the others had given their orders, and the bartender had begun to pour himself a drink at Tom's bidding, that the latter appeared to notice the solitary figure at the room's end. He turned toward this one, and the whisky bottle was in his hand; there was perhaps ten feet between them now.

"Join us?" Tom asked. The other shook his head, and was about to answer when Tom hurled the bottle with all the force in his right arm behind it. It had taken place so swiftly that those who were watching did not fully realize it; and the man with the beard was just beginning to raise his hand toward his weapon, when the missile splintered upon his forehead. He pitched forward upon his face, in a welter of blood and liquor. And before the dazed spectators had caught up with the quick transition of events, Tom had leaped over the prostrate form. They saw him fling open the door; it banged behind him; he was gone.

Outside, the darkness seemed absolute after the lights within. Here in the building's rear Tom saw the black loom of a ten-foot adobe wall against the stars. A dog snarled somewhere close by; he tripped upon a litter of empty boxes, and all but fell. Voices sounded in the room behind him, and the tramp of feet. He heard some one shout:

"This way! The back door, I tell you."

He had crossed the little yard and was at the foot of the wall. He leaped upward, and his fingers clutched the summit, when he heard the rattle of the knob, and the door flew open, letting out a flood of yellow light. He released his hold and dropped back into the shadow.

"Half a second more, and they'd have had me skylined," he told himself. He slipped his revolver from its holster and watched the open doorway. No one showed within. Evidently they were in no mind to make targets of themselves with the shine of the lamps upon them. Tom slid along the wall, feeling with his left hand as he went. There must be a gate near.

He felt it now, a blind gate of planks; his fingers were on the latch. A shadow appeared at the edge of the open doorway; he saw a little spurt of orange, and a slug thudded against the adobe wall; he heard the revolver's sharp report, and before he could level his own weapon, the space was empty once more. His fingers found the latch again; it rattled as he lifted it. The shadow in the doorway was beginning to appear again. Tom felt the gate give outward, and he slipped through it.

At once he was conscious of some one moving close by. It came about so quickly that he did not know whether he had heard this one, or whether he had seen him, first. And now the man was here, before him, less than twenty feet away. Their two weapons flamed; and where the other had been standing, a dim shadow in the night, there was now nothing.

Footsteps sounded within the yard whence he had fled. There must have been more than one of them in there. It was, as much as anything, the knowledge that his friends were waiting for him down at the corral, the realization that all their venture depended on his own safety, that made Tom run before the pursuers showed themselves. For his blood was racing hot within him, and the anger that comes to a bold man when the lead is flying had taken hold of him; and he would have been glad to shoot it out with them, then and there.

Here at the outskirts of the town, the mesquite clumps grew thick and tall; he heard their voices growing fainter as he fled within the shelter of the shadowed thickets. And it was nearly a half-hour later when he came to Leatherwood's corral and found his two companions waiting. They listened to his story, while they finished their packing and the saddling. And when he had done, old Jess said quietly:

"It aint so much these fellows behind us now, that I'm afraid of. Less than an hour ago, another outfit left—several of 'em and they are well heeled. Mounted on good horses. And the wrangler tells me that the one that seems to be in the lead goes by the name of Lant. Ever hear of him, Tom?"

"Never heard the name," Tom said. "What sort of a looking man?"

"Medium size, they say, and slim built. Blue eyes. They heard him speakin' of Agua Fria. What is it, Tom?"

The latter was cursing quietly.

"Sounds like a man I saw the day I stopped off at Pedro Romandiaz's place. That's all." And then he added doggedly: "Just the same, I'll swear by that Mexican and his girl."

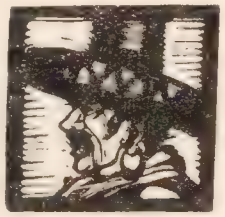
"We'll see, before we're through," Jess growled.

CHAPTER VI

A BANK of clouds was rising along the southern horizon blotting out the stars. Heat lightning flickered at intervals showing the black wall of the mountains in the distance; occasionally, a brighter flash revealed the clumps of creosote

beside the road, the tall saguaras with their gaunt branches and the lesser cacti sprinkling the arid plain.

"Nine months we've managed to do without rain," Jess growled. "And now it's got to come tonight." As if to show them that he was correct, a dull peal of thunder boomed and echoed to the south. And before they had gone ten miles, the summer downfall had begun, as if to make up for lost time. It fell in sheets, drenching their garments, soaking their bodies; and the dull mutter of the big drops was punctuated by sharp peals of thunder; the lightning glared until the horses flinched before it. The dusty road became as slippery as if it lay on soap. They eased the animals down to a walk.



So for more than three hours they traveled, with shoulders bent and heads bowed, while the torrent lashed them, easing off at times, only to begin again seemingly with renewed fury.

"Ought to be somewhere near the Pantano now," Tom called and Tuttle answered:

"I think I see a light ahead.

The old stage station stood on the mesa and the deep ravine which gashed the land was some distance away, but when they pulled up to talk over the situation, they could hear the sullen booming of the waters in full flood.

"May as well put up the hosses and give 'em a bite," Jess said. "The wash will be running bank full and we'll be waterbound till daylight anyhow, when we get to the bottom of the hill."

"You fellows unsaddle," Tom bade the other two when they had ridden up before the low adobe building. "I'll go roust somebody out."

He was a long time pounding on the door before he got an answer from within. And when the station keeper appeared, there was something in his face which Tom did not like; it was as if he could not, for the life of him, look his guest in the eye.

"Come from Tucson?" he asked and when Tom nodded, "How many of yo'?" he demanded, "and where are yo' bound?"

"Three of us, and I don't know as it's any of your business where we're heading for." Tom was beginning to feel his anger rise. The station keeper turned and started for his room.

"Me," he said over his shoulder, "I aint got no hay to spare. The Apaches cleaned me out las' week."

"If you don't turn around and find some hay right sudden," Tom told him quietly, "I'm going to finish up one part of that job that the Apaches didn't 'tend to."

Glancing around, the other saw the weapon in his guest's hand, whereat he changed his mind on the question of the feed and preceded Tom to the low-roofed shed beside the corral.

"'Pears like you might manage to worry along a while with what you've got," Tom remarked dryly when they saw the piled-up bales with which the place was stored. To which the other made no answer, but when the feeding had been completed, he seemed to have experienced a change of heart.

"Understand," he told his guests, "it's comp'ny's orders, and not my wishin'. And if you fellows come inside the station, you'll find it dryer sleepin'."

It was while they were on their way to the building that Tom found the chance to tell his companions what had taken place between him and the station tender; wherefore, when the latter had gone on to his own sleeping quarters, the three conferred in whispers, with the result that they drew straws for turns on night guard. Jess was the loser and got the middle watch.

Some two hours later, after he had finished his period of sentry duty and had sought his blankets on the floor of the station dining-room, to drop off almost at once to sleep, Tom was awakened by a terrific commotion out in the corral. He had his revolver in his hand and was running toward the door when he collided with Tuttle in the darkness. The two of them rushed forth together, to find Jess standing by the bars, his weapon in his hand.

"I reckon I'd dropped off," he told them. "And it was the hosses woke me up. That one you're ridin', Ed, was lashing out with both feet. But by the time I got to where I could see what was going on, things had quieted down and no one was in sight. Mebbe it was a false alarm."

"Maybe so," Tuttle cut in, "but as I was coming out of the door, I thought I heard somebody running. The sound was close by, but it was so dark I couldn't see my hand before my face."

"Well, if there was anybody pestering around," Jess said, "the chances are he won't show up again. And anyhow there's been no harm done that I can see."

So the other two went back to their blankets and Jess resumed his sentry duty; and all was quiet during the rest of the night. They had their breakfast cooked before daylight and they were saddled up by the time the sky was flushing in the east. And Tuttle, who paid the feed bill, reported that the station keeper was limping badly.

"Which he was sound enough las' night," Jess growled. "If we could only afford the time, I'd be in favor of going in and having a little talk with that fellow."

But time, as he had intimated, was doubly precious after this delay, and they did not care to risk the loss of any more by such complications as Jess' proposed talk might bring. So they swung into their saddles and the station keeper watched them from the doorway.

"I'd like to know what he was up to," Tom remarked as they were riding off.

They did not have long to wait for the answer to that question. The first suspicion began to come to them when they had descended the long hill and were crossing the wash, where only a trickle of muddy waters remained from last night's flood. Here, in the gully bed, there was some boggy going and the horses were making heavy work of it; too heavy, it would seem. They were some five miles farther on, when the truth became unmistakable.

Tuttle was the first to speak of it.

"This hoss of mine is plumb logy," he called out.

"Got nothing on mine," Tom told him.

"Me," Jess said, "I've been watching these animals. And I wish now I'd followed my hunch and had it out with that station keeper."

"Think he got at 'em last night?" Tom asked.

"I know it now," the other growled. "They been poisoned, all of 'em. Colic. That's what ails 'em. We'll do well if they last the day out at four miles an hour."

The sun was coming on hot now and before they had been traveling another hour, the three animals were stumbling along with bowed heads.

"Which," Jess groaned, "it was my fault. If I'd kep' awake, I'd of seen that fellow, and before he got to their hay, he'd of been too dead to skin."

"If we can shove 'em as hard as they'll stand, the chances are we can get hold of fresh stock at the San Pedro crossin'," Tuttle suggested. But the other two shook their heads.

"I've been thinking ever since we crossed the wash," Tom said, "how it would be better if we didn't come in sight of the station at the river."

"Yo're right," Jess announced. "We'd run into worse there than we did at the Pantano. Turn off to the south and follow the old Apache trail up into the Whetstone mountains. We can make the Mustang Springs by night. And mebbe in the morning these bronchos will be able to travel."

Noontime was long past, and the sun was blazing from a cloudless sky; it was one of those days, following a summer rain, when every rattlesnake and gila monster comes from the crevices among the rocks to bask in the fervid heat. They were making slow work of it, climbing the first slopes of the great bare range on the valley's eastern side. The horses were trembling with weakness and they had to halt to rest them at frequent intervals. It was during one of these stops, while he was sitting with one leg crooked over the saddle-horn, that Tom spoke to his companions of the men whom they had set forth to overtake.

"By this time," he said, "they'll be a good thirty miles ahead or more. And riding fast."

Jess shook his head. "Don't look as if we were going to catch up with them, and that's a fact."

Tuttle sat silent, frowning at the slope.

"But I've made up my mind," Tom went on after a long pause. "And it's up to you two whether you want to stick with the proposition or not. I'm figuring to shove on to that ledge anyhow. And if they're there, make 'em fight for it," he declared.

There might have been more said on the subject, if it had not been that Jess happened to look back at just the right moment. He shaded his eyes with his hand and peered down the long slopes for some time.

"Some one coming on behind us," he said finally. And when the others turned: "No use to try and find 'em now. They've gone behind that clump of mesquite down there on the flats. But, as nigh as I could make out, it's a big outfit. Men and pack-hosses. A dozen of 'em in the saddle."

"Might not be Sam Gates' men," Tuttle said at length.

"That would be too much good luck for us," Jess growled. "It's them, all right. The second outfit with the tools and grub. The others went ahead, light, and this bunch is hangin' to our trail. Well, we can make the Mustang Springs and, if they want trouble, why we can give 'em plenty."

"I have got a scheme," Tom said. "And it looks good to me." He told them the idea as they went slowly up into the heights where the bear grass grew in tall clumps among the pin oaks and all the lands below them lay like a wide map. And when he had finished, Jess chuckled.

"Son," he declared, "I don't mind telling yo', that's the first thing I've heard today that's sounded like good news."

They spurred their jaded horses on; and the afternoon was nearly over, the shadows were beginning to grow long down in the distant valley flats, when they reached the waterhole called Mustang Springs.

THE waterhole lay in a little bowl-like depression, not far from the summit of the ridge, a clear cool pool, surrounded by tufts of the coarse bear grass. Farther off on the small flat, there was a bit of good pasture where the gramma grass grew knee-high.

"It sure seems a mean trick, we're going to play on these hosses," Jess growled, "but we've ourselves to think of now. I reckon they'll have to go without this feed."

They dismounted and let the animals drink; and they took their own fill, for their canteens had been empty since early in the afternoon. The sun was slipping toward the summit of the range when they were ready to mount and go on again.

"Near as a man can judge," Tom told the other two, "those fellows are a good hour behind us now; and they'll come mighty slow the last mile or two for fear of ambush. We've got plenty of time."

Ed Tuttle sighed and shook his head at Tom.

"If this scheme of yours don't work out right," said he, "I'll never forgive you for making us leave a good camp and get into the saddle again. Me, I'm sore from head to foot from ridin' a jaded horse."

"Unless I'm plumb wrong in my understandin' of human nature, Tom's showed himself a general," Jess asserted; "and by midnight we'll be well-mounted once more. That outfit won't pass up this camp, at this time of day."

They swung into their saddles and rode away. Here the trail swung along the mountain flank, passing through an interval where granite boulders strewed the hillside, to come out again into the tall tufts of bear grass, and after another half mile, they reached a second spring. It was far smaller than the one where they had halted, and there was but little level land near by; the feed was sparse.

They dismounted and unsaddled and, instead of picketing the horses, they turned them loose.

"And now," Jess said, "it's either a case of bein' afoot or getting better mounts before next sunup." He nodded approvingly and looked around. "Anybody that rides through those rocks back there has got to come single file. If there was a hundred of 'em, they wouldn't try to rush us as long as a man can see to line his sights."

"May as well get ourselves a bite of supper," Tuttle suggested. "Nobody's going to show up here for an hour or so anyhow."

The light was waning when they had finished their meal. They left the dishes as they were and stuffed their pockets with such food as remained.

"Liable to be a day or two before we sit down to any hot coffee again," Jess reminded them, and they drained the pot in silence. Tom was looking back up the trail by which they had come.

"Reckon they'll be along by this time. If you fellows wait here, I'll go back and have a look," he told the other two.

He was absent for the better part of an hour and when he returned, the darkness was beginning to settle down.

"They're getting supper now," he announced. "You'd of thought we were an army, the way they scouted out the place before they showed themselves. And when I left they were still pow-wowing. They don't know what to make of our not being there. I've spotted the horses. They've picketed out the riding-stock at this end of the flat, with the saddles close by. The pack-animals are mostly loose."

"Reckon mebbe they'll send some one on to take a look at this place?" Jess asked. "Some of 'em's bound to know about the spring."

"That's so. I never thought of that." Tom was silent for a moment. "What's the matter with fixing things up, just so's they'll seem all right?"

They did this with considerable care; and when they had finished, they had a good-sized fire burning; in its

light, the beds were made down and all so arranged that one, looking at the spot from the direction of the trail, would be very sure to judge every heap of blankets was occupied by its owner. And, when they had given the spot a final examination, to make certain that they had overlooked nothing which might betray the real state of affairs, they took their rifles and stole away into the darkness up the hillside. They had barely gotten well beyond the firelight when Tom felt Jess grip him by the arm. In his turn he whispered a warning to Tuttle, and the three of them sank down in the shadows.

Where the trail from the larger waterhole passed through the boulders, it topped a sharp ridge, and the rocks stood out against the skyline. Overhead, the first early stars were beginning to glow. They could see that portion of the pathway clearly; and the bent figure of a man. They watched him come on slowly until the darkness of the lower levels swallowed him. Some moments passed, while they held their breaths; they heard the tinkle of a granite fragment and then the silence came again. It lasted for what seemed a long time and they were beginning to think he must be coming close—perhaps too close for the deception of those made-down beds to last—when he reappeared, where he had first shown.

"Well, he was fooled all right," Jess said when they dared to speak once more. "They won't be worrying their heads about us now."

"Just the same," Tuttle muttered, "I don't like the looks of this. They know we're here. No telling what they may do now. I'd feel a heap easier, if we were back beyond that narrow place in the trail."

"No reason why we can't go right away, that I can see," Tom told him. "What do you say, Jess?"

"Suits me," Jess said. "The nearer we are to them hosses of theirs, the more liable we are to get 'em, if anything goes wrong."

So it came that they changed their plans and afterward, when he came to think of it, Tom realized by what a narrow margin of chance they came to safety through what was in the beginning a mere vague premonition. The interval where the trail passed among the rocks was perhaps two hundred yards in length; and they had barely passed it when Jess, who was in the lead, halted abruptly.

"Hark," he whispered. They listened for a moment and they caught the murmur of voices through the night, and the unmistakable dull sound that comes from a number of men walking on uneven ground. None of the three spoke now. They dropped on their hands and knees and crept up the hillside. The bear grass grew thick here; they had just time to sink down on their bellies among the tufts, when the sky was darkened by the silhouetted forms of a half-dozen men.

They came on in single file, and, where he was lying, Tom could see something that seemed to gleam in the darkness on the leader's head. As he was looking, the man halted. He was perhaps ten feet away. And, as he turned toward the others, Tom saw the black smudge of his beard; and the thing that had shone so plainly on his brow; it was a white bandage. He could hear Ed Tuttle's breathing close beside him. And then the man with the beard was speaking.

"Now that we're where those packers can't hear, I'm going to tell you. There is one of these fellows that we have got to get and get him right. We can't let him get away. Mind what I say. So, when we get the place surrounded, then I give the word, 'Han's up.' And you don't need to wait then, but just cut loose. The idee is, this party that I told you of is the man that done that shooting back in Tucson. So when you come back to camp after it's over, why remember, our story is that he tried to shoot it out again. That's why we fired. Got that?"

There was a murmur of acquiescence from the group.

"All right," the man with the beard rasped. "And don't forget it. And from now on, nobody makes a sound."

He started on and the rest filed past. The three in the bear grass waited until they were beyond hearing.

"No time for us to lose now," Jess whispered. "You take the lead, Tom. We got to get those hosses before those murderers cut loose. After that, it's a case of the devil take the hindmost."

Save for a few scattered little pin oaks, the mountainside was bare here; in a short time they were in sight of the fire at the waterhole. Two or three men were busy with their blankets; and several others were sitting on their bed-rolls smoking. The three stole by along the hillside and made their way down to the little flat, where the dark forms of the horses showed. One of the animals caught sight of them, on their hands and knees among the clumps of bear grass and snorted violently. A man back there in the firelight got to his feet, and they could hear him saying, "What's that?"

The voice of a companion came through the night. "Never hear a broncho blow before?" And some one else laughed.

"Now boys," Tom whispered, "here's the saddles." The voice of the alarmist came to them from the campfire:

"Jest the same, I'm going to have a look." They dropped on their bellies and watched him coming toward them. The horse that had caused the diversion had quieted down now. The man took half a dozen steps and halted irresolutely, still within the circle of the fire's radiance. Then he turned and went back to his blankets.

The three rose and went slowly toward the nearest animals. It took them some time; for the one which had fallen to Tuttle's lot was still suspicious; but at last they had the rawhide tethers in their hands.

"Quiet with them saddles," Jess warned. But that was easier said than done. It seemed to them that the noise of rattling stirrups was like the sound of rifle-shots. And more than once they had to cease their work to let one of the uneasy animals settle down. At last they had it done. They looked at the men in the firelight by the spring; the three bedmakers had finished and the others were now busy at their blanket rolls.

There was a sharp click as Jess opened his pocket-knife.

"Hold this hoss of mine," he bade Tom. "I'm going to cut those pack-animals loose." He slipped away in the darkness and was gone for some time. When he reappeared, "I've been thinkin'," he told the other two, "it might be better if we sneaked around this bunch; got on the other side—and then we could stampede them ahead of us."

They swung into the saddles and they were riding slowly in a wide circle about the little flat, when one of the men in the firelight leaped to his feet.

"Some one down there—"

The crash of several rifles near the other waterhole interrupted his alarm. The volley awoke a hundred echoes on the mountainside. And before the echoes died, it was

repeated. The men by the fire were on their feet now and everyone of them, including the one who had uttered that call, had turned toward the spot where the shooting came from. None heard the thudding of the hoofs down on the flat.

That thudding had grown into a reverberating uproar; and the stampeded band of horses was coming on at a dead run before they were aware of its presence. It swept past the camp and was gone, and the three riders whooping in the rear were swallowed in the darkness by the time those about the fire had an inkling of what was taking place.

Old Jess was leaning far forward in the saddle, riding deep. He edged his horse nearer to Tom's.

"If we can get 'em past that bad place in the trail," he yelled, "then we are in the clear."

And it seemed as if they were among the rocks in the next moment.

It was one of those tense little intervals when a man's life hangs on the turning of many small chances. The riders hung back a bit, to let the driven band line out, praying that no animal would overcrowd his fellows. There was a clashing of hoofs on the granite and, once, Tom's mount stumbled. He reined him up and in the next instant the horse was leaping over something. Tom heard the threshing of legs beneath him and realized that some horse had gone down; that his animal was jumping over the prostrate body; then he was in the clear. And the light of the campfire by the little spring was before him. He had a glimpse of several forms about the beds which he and his companions had so carefully made down. The forms straightened up and he could see the man with the beard standing there, white-faced, gazing toward him in the firelight. Another instant and the foremost horse had swept upon the spot. The man with the beard and his companions were blotted out. . . .

Two hours later, when they were riding along the bare mountainside, they came to a little flat where the feed was good.

"Better we pull up and dry-camp here," Jess proposed, "These hosses won't stand up to the end without a rest. And we can get a little sleep."

"By starting early in the morning," Tom said, "we should make the ledge by sundown or a little after. And there's a bare chance the other crowd won't be ahead of us. For the way we've come cuts off a good twenty miles."

"All of which," Jess replied, "is fine, providin' yo'r greaser friends aint holding it down for 'em."

LATER, when they were settling down by their fire which had to take the place of blankets, Tom found that last remark still rankling.

"Why," he asked the older man, "are you so set against Mexicans?"

Jess was smoking at the time. He puffed on his cigarette for some moments before he answered.

"It goes back nigh to twenty years." He spoke quietly and his voice was hard. "Me, I was a young man then. Ridin' west from Texas; and I throwed in with a wagon outfit. Father, mother and five kids. The youngest was a baby; she was jest able to run around. I used to hold her in front of me on the saddle sometimes." He paused and looked away into the night.

"I got to think a heap of her." Then he was silent again. His voice was ugly when he resumed.

"Som'eres nigh where Hachita is today, we separated. I had to go to Prescott and they was to hang to the old trail along the border, figurin' to keep clear of the Apaches who was raidin' up along the Gila. I never heard of 'em again, till a year later, one day, in Yuma. There I met a feller and he tol' me the story.

"'Pears like they camped in Guadalupe Cañon, at the waterhole. It must of been the next night after I'd left 'em. And a bunch of greaser bandits jumped 'em. Wiped 'em all out. The feller that tol' me was goin' by there a week later; and he seen what was left. . . . Greasers!"

CHAPTER VII

THE day's heat was over and the scattering of little mud brick houses which made up the hamlet of Agua Fria was basking in the last sun rays which flowed across the wall of the western mountains. Chiquita and old Pedro Romandiaz were standing before the door of their home. The girl was shading her eyes with her hand, and she was looking to the north, up the dim winding ribbon of gray which marked the Tucson road. Her father watched her, waiting upon the news of what she saw there in the distance.

"The dust," she said at length, "is thick. I can make out several shapes; but whether they are pack-mules or horsemen, that I do not know.

"It may be the men from Silver City with their goods," the old man said, but the girl shook her head.

"There are not enough of them; and the *contrabandistos* are not to be here until tomorrow night. This evening they would reach the pass in the Dragoons, thirty miles away."

"Perhaps,"—her father's voice showed a greater eagerness,—"it is our friend, Logan. And with him, the men he was to bring."

She did not answer for some time; and if the old eyes had been sharper, they would have noticed the heightened color on her cheeks, the quickening of her breathing. But he saw nothing of this and he waited in silence while she continued to watch the advancing dust cloud. At length, she uttered a little exclamation and now the joy in her voice was evident, even to him.

"I think," she told him, "that you are right, my father. For these are men on horseback, and there are six of them. Americans—yes. I can see the hats plainly now. Americans. It would be—" She checked herself. "I will go to the corral and see," she added more quietly, and was off at once.

The old man sank down on the wooden bench beside the doorway. This business of waiting for another to bring the news to him was not to his liking; but he was beginning to get used to it, as he was beginning to get used to other little changes which age had brought with it. He sighed resignedly. The dust cloud came on nearer; and he watched the figure of his daughter standing by the corral gate; her hand was still shading her eyes. Suddenly he saw the figure turn and now she was coming back. Coming, first at a walk, then running. And for a moment he was thinking:

"Well, then, it will be the good news she brings so eagerly."

But when his dim eyes got a good look at her face, he knew this was not happy tidings which she was bearing. For her cheeks were white and her dark eyes were wide with dread; and when she came to a halt before the doorway, she was sobbing for breath.

"Quickly, my father," she cried, "we must go inside."

"It is not Logan, then?" He was rising to his feet as he asked it. She shook her head.

"It is not Logan, then?" He was rising to his feet as race down the street and her own emotions had taken from her, "it is the other one. You remember him. The one that tried—"

"I know." He was on his feet now and in the doorway,

and she was urging him on in, her hands upon his back.

"But why would that one come back?" he asked her when they were in the room. "And with those others?"

"I do not know." She was calmer now and her voice was quite steady. "I only know that it is he. And that he saw me before I recognized him and turned to go. And you and I are alone." She waved her hand in a contemptuous gesture toward the little adobes along the street. "Not one man among them all who is fit to help us if he would."

"But perhaps there is no need for their help, my daughter," he soothed her. She shook her head.

"If only the *contrabandistos* were here now," she murmured. "No. We will bar the doors." And as she was speaking, the *rat-tat-tat* of hoofs came on down the roadway from the direction of the corral. She slammed the heavy door shut and dropped the wooden bar in place behind it. The hoofbeats stopped with the scraping sound that comes when a horse is pulled up suddenly.

"You there inside." No need to seek further confirmation of her bad tidings now. The old man knew that voice. Chiquita had left his side. He heard her slam the rear door and he heard the wooden fastening drop home.

The sound of Lant's laughter came from the street. And then the curt voice once more: "I'll be back later, greaser!"

Old Pedro Romandiaz said no word now. He walked into the rear rooms, where the sleeping-quarters were; and his back was straight; his white head was back; only the stiffness of his limbs betrayed the slowing up of age. When he returned, his daughter was in the living-room; she saw the old single-shot Sharp's rifle which he carried in one hand, and in the other palm, a handful of the big grasshopper cartridges.

"Now we will wait for him to come," he said quietly, and laid the long-barreled weapon on the table. Then he drew up a chair and sat down. "Yes, we will wait for him." His old lips were tight and there was a new light in the faded eyes.

He felt Chiquita's little hand upon his shoulder, and he looked around.

"I go to the roof and watch," she said. He nodded. And she left him there alone.

The adobe houses of Agua Fria were built with the idea of Apache raids; and there was none in the place but had its trapdoor with a ladder leading up through it; and round the roof, a low parapet of the thick sun-dried bricks. Pedro Romandiaz had been sitting by the table in the living-room for some time when he heard his daughter coming down the ladder.

"Their fire is burning, and they are at their evening meal," she told him. "Now we will eat."

She brought him food and when they had finished, she went back to her post again. She took with her a long-barreled cap-and-ball revolver from the sleeping-room.

Their weapons spat thin streaks of orange through the swirling fumes. But they were shooting like blind men.

So it happened that when Lant came up the street a few minutes later and dismounted before the little building, he had no more than raised his hand to hammer on the heavy door when a voice above his head made him start.

"I have the gun," the voice said, "and I will shoot if you do not leave now."

He laughed. They had been drinking by the fire, and he had a good pint of the mescal within him now. He looked up and got sight of her head above the low parapet. And then, as he stood wide-footedly, swaying just a little, regarding her, the old revolver bellowed, spitting smoke into his face. And the girl said:

"The next time I will shoot for you."

Lant heard the rasping of a heavy object on the narrow window sill near by and started back, this time in earnest. He got one glimpse of the rifle barrel thrust over the sill and he turned away. And the girl upon the roof top could hear him cursing to himself long after he had vanished up the street.

Old Pedro was still standing at the narrow window when she slipped down the ladder and came beside him.

"If I leave you, my father, now, and ride for help?" she whispered.

"But where?" he asked. She laid her hand upon his.

"Listen, Father. It is the one chance. Five hours to the Dragoon Pass and five hours back. It may be less time. It will not be more."

"You will seek the *contrabandistos?*"

"And they will come," she told him swiftly. "There is but one thing to do. You must go to the roof. And if this man appears again, you have the chance to keep him

off. And,"—she was trembling now; he could feel it in her hand quite plainly,—"I have been thinking, Father. There is more than you and me to save. For why would this man be back, with five others? There is one thing to bring them. They have come for the claim—the ledge that Logan told us of. You remember?"

"But how will you go?" he whispered.

"There is the horse of Pancho Vasquez. Behind his house, in the little corral Pancho made for himself. It is a strong horse and it is fresh."

He was silent for some time. At length, "I see nothing now," he said. "Perhaps this fellow will not return."

"Then there will be no danger here for you," she answered swiftly.

"It is not that," he told her quietly. "I have no fear. It was for you I was in dread when I spoke."

She kissed him on the cheek, and he sighed.

"Yes. It is right," he went on. "Go you. But first, help me, for the ladder is steep and these old limbs of mine, they are not as willing as the soul of me."

And when she had helped him up the ladder, she went back to the sleeping-room and brought up blankets, for the nights grow cool along the border sometimes when morning draws near. Then she left the old cap-and-ball revolver with him and they kissed each other.

"God be with you!" He breathed the benediction in her ear; and she departed, leaving him alone up there beneath the bright splendor of the sunset sky. The moments dragged. . . . The silence returned once more.

Down near the corral of ocatilla boughs where the coals of the dying campfire glowed in the dusk, he could distinguish moving forms. Then they too disappeared.

Perhaps these ruffians were going to their rest. Perhaps they would ride away when morning came; and this would be the last of them. He lingered on the thought as if it were a prayer, for he was old and there were six of them; and a man's blood must run hot and strong when he is willing to face such odds as that.

The silence was broken by a shot. Old Pedro Romandiaz dropped on his knees behind the parapet of sun-dried bricks. The long-barreled Sharp's rifle was in his hands, and on the roof beside him, a little heap of cartridges. There was still light enough to show the wisp of powder smoke floating away from the corner of the nearest building—a cube of mud bricks across the roadway. He leveled the buffalo gun, resting the long barrel on the top of the low wall. The head and shoulders of a man appeared, hugging the corner of the building; the old Sharp's flamed into the twilight; and the report awoke distant echoes.

HIS blood was running warmer now. He had forgotten his age. He slipped a cartridge into the breech. The rifle across the street spat another streak of brightness; and he slid his weapon to its resting-place.

Then there came a new sound.

The tinkle of glass; and then the splintering of wood. They had slipped up behind the house while he was busy here; they were smashing one of the rear windows.

Now he could hear the tramp of booted feet beneath him; and a voice called up to him, in Spanish:

"All right, greaser; do you want to come down and be hung, or will we burn the house and you with it?"

He crept to the trapdoor. At least he could go down fighting. He thrust the rifle through the aperture and fired into the room. The report made a mighty crash in the close space; and there followed the scrape of boot heels; a man groaned.

No time for reloading now. He flung the rifle aside and he took the old revolver in his hand. Perhaps he could get one more of them before he died.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was near evening when Tom Logan and his two companions swung down the long bare slopes to begin their descent into the valley where Agua Fria lay.

"There is no use in shovin' these hosses too hard," Jess was saying. "For maybe we've got a race ahead of us."

So they took it easily down through the yuccas to the arid benchlands where the Spanish bayonet and the naked ocatilla bushes began to show among the rocks. The sun was near the skyline and the golden light was shaking over the wide landscape; they could see the mesquite thickets, all green along the bottomlands, the tall cottonwoods beside the stream.

"The way I look at it," Ed Tuttle told the other two when they had halted at the edge of a mesa which commanded a sweep of the whole valley, "there's a fair chance for us now—if only we have luck. Those fellows left Tucson only a little ways ahead of us, and they'd not be expecting us to come so soon. For, accordin' to their plans, Tom was to turn up missing. And, if he didn't, they'd fixed it to delay us at Pantano, anyhow."

"Which I reckon yo're right," Jess said. "And they'd be no reason for their shovin' on fast. Right now, I figger it, they are as liable as not to be in camp at Agua Fria."

Tom remained studying the landmarks. At length—

"Agua Fria," he announced, "should lie two miles or so further up the river."

There was something in his voice which made the others turn to look at him. It was as if the subject were not to his liking; and he was frowning, as he gazed up the valley toward the spot where the hamlet lay concealed beyond the outthrust of the near-by mesa.

"Better we make the crossing down here, and swing clear of that place," Jess proposed.

So they rode down the last slope where the mesas followed one another like a flight of enormous stairs to the low lands. And they came among the mesquite thickets, where the going was slow. The sky had flushed deep pink and the color had already begun to deepen. The sun was down when they forded the river, still swollen from the recent rain. They climbed from the bottom lands to the valley floor. Off to their right, a good two miles, the little hamlet showed, for all the world like a few child's blocks. And, at the nearer end, where the corral of ocatilla branches stood, they caught sight of a slender column of smoke.

"Campfire," Tom pointed to the pallid thread twining from the floor of the valley to the painted sky. He shook his head. "We have got a long ways out here in the open. Right in plain sight."

They spurred the tired horses on; and Tom was in the lead. The mouth of the wash showed straight before them, a sharp cleft in the mesa, through which they could see vague mysteries of old rose and gray and mauve. His eyes were on that pathway to the riches which he had discovered—and left—a week ago.

An exclamation made him turn his head. Jess was looking behind; he raised his hand and pointed back there; and then Tom saw what seemed in the distance like a toy horse and a toy rider. The shape glided along the bare valley floor and a thin mist of dust rose above it.

"What do you reckon this means?" Tuttle asked.

"Trick, mebbe," Jess growled. "Le's shove on."

But Tom had pulled up and he was shading his eyes with his hand, watching the rider.

"No time for foolin' now, kid," Jess called, and set spurs to his horse. Tuttle was riding beside him; they had gone a few yards when the sound of a rifle-shot came to them, faint and far. Now they too pulled up; and there followed the *pop-popping* of more shots.

"Well, Tom!" Jess' voice was sharp. "Be yo' coming?"

Tom did not heed him. And it was not the sound of those shots that held him here. He looked more closely.

"That's a girl riding," he called.

Jess swore.

"Anyhow," Tuttle reminded him, "a girl can't hurt us. And mebbe she needs help."

"Nobody but greasers in that town," Jess replied.

"I'm going to stick here," Tuttle said.

And so they waited and presently saw Tom set spurs to his horse and ride out to meet the girl. The two horses ranged side by side; they remained thus for a moment or two; and then Tom raised his hand. The watchers galloped up to him. Jess was swearing under his breath.

"Done tol' yo'," he muttered; "she's a greaser."

But he fell silent as they came within earshot; and while Tom told the story, which Chiquita had told him, he sat there in the saddle with his shaggy brows drawn together, glowering at the earth before his horse.

"Supposin'," he said dryly, when the young fellow had finished, "this was another put-up job?"

Tom looked him in the eyes. And there was that in the look, which would have silenced most men. But Jess shook his head.

"'Pears to me, I mind yo're tellin' me about how much this claim meant to yo', Tom. Are yo' willin' to run yo'r head into an ambush for the sake of a girl—an' leave yo'r father flat?"

Tom lifted his hand abruptly.

"My father," he said quietly, "would not think much of me, if I went on."

And he reined his horse around toward Agua Fria.

Jess had raised his eyes to meet the younger man's gaze; now for the first time, they rested on Chiquita. And a change came into them. The sullenness departed before a sudden tenderness—a tenderness that was wistful.

He said no word but spurred on and Tuttle followed; now the three men were together and the girl beside them.

CHAPTER IX

PEDRO ROMANDIAZ crouched on the flat roof, the cap-and-ball six-shooter in his hand. Then spirals of powder-smoke came up through the trap bringing to his nostrils the reek of violence. He could see a portion of the room beneath him; and on the earthen floor a man who lay face upward; one knee doubled and as the old man looked, the limb straightened; a shudder passed over the whole form, and then the only thing that moved was the crimson patch that widened slowly on the breast of the blue shirt.

He could hear the others stirring, and the mutter of their voices beyond the little space which the hatchway commanded; and he knew that they were waiting there with their weapons cocked, ready to fire the moment he showed himself. The voices trailed off into a whispering and suddenly they swelled again.

It came to him then that, if he were only a few years younger, he could creep to the parapet and drop to the earth; and perhaps he might yet escape them. But his limbs were stiff with age and he knew that the drop was too great for him.

They were moving down there in the room. He heard a door bang, and the scrape of some heavy object; a dull crash on the earthen floor.

"All right," a voice called, "fetch in the mattresses."

And some one laughed. Pedro Romandiaz thrust his head close to the trapdoor. The smell of hot smoke came to his nostrils, and almost at once a thick cloud bellied upward through the hole in the roof. He saw a splintered chair and the heavy table overturned beside it; and a red flame licking the dry wood.

The walls of the building were of the adobe bricks, but the roof where he was crouching was of hewn planks, and the thick beams which served as rafters were as arid as tinder. In a few minutes the fire would be eating into the wood above it. The heat bit into his face and a volley of big sparks enveloped him; the smoke was blinding now. A voice came upward:

"Better we get outside. He'll come a-running when he does come."

And the listener knew what those words meant. Wait here and burn; or flee and be shot down.

THE smoke cloud was growing black; it poured through the trapdoor, fringed with a myriad of sparks which floated high into the deepening twilight. Then he was conscious of a new sound—the dull beat of hoofs on the dusty earth. It came nearer, then stopped. And some one down there in the room beneath him yelled.

A spattering of shots; and the splintering of broken glass. He crept to the parapet.

They had come on the building from two sides. Jess and Tuttle were in the rear and Tom Logan had ridden up in front. And when they pulled up their horses, the five within were on their way to the two entrances: two were dragging the dead man toward the wide front door; the other three were hurrying to the door in the back, when one of the latter heard the horses and uttered that yell.

Then the pair in the front dropped their burden and caught up their weapons; and before they had cocked their revolvers the firing had begun at the other end of the building.

Here, where they stood, the smoke was sucked outward by the draft. Their eyes were filled with scalding tears. They saw the horseman outside, a dim form that swam before their vision; and their weapons spat thin streaks of orange through the swirling fumes. But they were shooting like blind men; and Tom had nothing to hinder his aim. He fired twice and they went down on the threshold.

Tom swung from the saddle and rushed into the building. The shooting at the rear door had already ceased. He saw Tuttle advancing toward him through the smoke and had a glimpse of Jess' tall form behind.

Against the room's back wall, a heap of flaming straw and splintered furniture; the flames had already caught the rafters. Tom started for the ladder.

"He would be up there," he shouted; and the voice of Romandiaz came through the open trap in answer.

There was but little chance to see within these walls; and in the swift moments of action there had been as little opportunity for clear thought. And so it happened that, while the three of them were stumbling through the smoke clouds toward the ladder, one man, out of these five who had been fighting for their lives here a few seconds before, got to his feet by the rear door.

That man was Lant. He had seen the pair outside confronting him, their weapons in their hands; and he had dropped to his knees. But before he could use his revolver, one of his companions had pitched forward and fallen upon him. By the time he had shaken the dying man from his back, Jess and Tuttle had rushed on past him. And now the fight was over; they were gone. He heard their voices in the other room and he staggered across the threshold to the open air.

Now, for the first time since he had gone down, he realized that he was unhurt.

He saw two horses; they had shied away from the smell of smoke and were standing, with the reins drag-

ging, some distance from the spot where Jess and Tuttle had dismounted. He was hastening toward them, when he heard another animal coming on the run. He looked around and caught sight of the rider in the twilight.

It was Chiquita.

When the three men had ridden into Agua Fria she had dropped behind at their bidding and had remained near the corral of ocatilla boughs. Here she had watched the dark cloud of smoke rising from the roof of the house, all reddened with the light of flames around its edges, and surrounded by a fountain of sparks that winked out as they climbed toward the fading sky. She had listened to the noise of firing; and, when it had died away, as abruptly as it had begun, she had started on. So she was coming, and her eyes were upon the flat roof where she had left her father; she had failed to see Lant stealing forth from the rear door. Then she uttered a little cry of relief. For a form showed just beyond the low parapet, outlined against the sky. It was Pedro.

As she uttered that cry, Lant's eyes hardened to a greater ugliness and his thin lips drooped. His six-shooter was in his hand. In the other he held the reins of Jess' horse. He stepped out, and the horse which Tuttle had left was no longer between him and the girl. He leveled his weapon.

"*You*—anyhow!" He was saying it under his breath. His finger squeezed down on the trigger.

The finger tightened; and the revolver spat its stream of brightness; but the streak of flame and the leaden slug buried themselves in the dry earth before him; and the report of the forty-five was silenced by the boom of the old Sharp's rifle from the roof top.

Lant pitched forward upon his face. And old Pedro Romandiaz stood gazing down over the parapet upon the man he had killed. So the three companions found him, when they climbed up through the trap.

CHAPTER X

SOMETIME later, when they had managed to put out the fire and remove the last ugly evidences of violence from the house of Pedro Romandiaz, Tuttle spoke to Tom concerning a matter which was puzzling him.

"Notice how Jess looks at that girl, Chiquita?" he asked.

Tom nodded.

"Maybe he's getting over his dislike for Mexicans."

"Either that, or the old boy's making an exception of her," Tuttle said. "I wonder what's got into him."

But for the present there was no opportunity for solving such small riddles as this. During the next twenty-four hours the three companions had their hands full. Two of their enemies were badly wounded. What with tending to these, burying the dead, and making the last stage of their expedition to the silver ledge, it was not until the following evening that they thought upon Jess' changed demeanor again; and then the solution came in a startling manner.

It is, as old Pedro Romandiaz had warned Tom in the beginning, one thing to find a ledge and another to hold it. And for the latter purpose, the owners of the claim had hit upon the plan of hiring some of the *contrabandistos* for a few days. For the pack train had come down late that afternoon on its way back to the Mexican villages from Silver City and the smugglers were in camp at the ocatilla corral. So the three had ridden into Agua Fria with this business in mind; and they were sitting by the campfire, discussing it with the swarthy riders, when the subject of the fight came up. And Tuttle was speaking with considerable admiration of old Pedro Romandiaz.

"Anybody would think," said he, "that he's smelt his share of powder-smoke before."

"And that my friend," the leader of the *contrabandistos* said, "is very true. Pedro Romandiaz, he was what you call a warrior. Myself, I have seen him when the lead was flying thick." He stroked his thick gray mustache and lighted a corn-husk cigarette.

"Soldier?" Tuttle asked.

"No, my friend," the smuggler said, "A *contrabandisto* such as we are. That was twenty years ago. And it was in the Guadalupe Cañon that I saw him fight."

Tuttle nudged Tom. "Look at Jess," he whispered.

THEIR companion was on the farther side of the fire. He had risen to his knees; he was leaning forward regarding the speaker with eyes that were like two slits beneath his bushy brows.

"In Guadalupe Cañon." Jess' voice was tense. "Twenty years ago."

"We were with the pack train, he and I," the smuggler went on. "And we were on our way to the north. We were coming through the gorge when we heard the sound of rifles and we thought it would perhaps be the Apaches; so we were ready for the fight when we came upon the place. But it was not the Indians. It was a company of bandits; they had ridden up from Sinaloa, having heard of the loads of dollars that our mules carried. They had been waiting for us, when another outfit came down the cañon from the American side. It was a wagon outfit; and the bandits had ambushed it. They were killing the last of these unlucky travelers when we got sight of them."

He nodded serenely. And Jess leaned farther forward across the fire. "Go on," he said.

"Go on?" The smuggler shrugged his shoulders. "Well, what then? It was a good fight. And you have seen fighting. That is all." He puffed on his cigarette.

The smuggler threw his cigarette aside.

"This tobacco which one gets in Silver City is no good," he grumbled. "I will be glad when I am across the line again where one can lay his hands on a decent cigarette." He rose and stretched himself.

"If you would know more about it,"—he turned to Jess—"ask Pedro himself. He tells of that battle often. You see, my friend, it was there he got his little girl." He paused abruptly, staring at the other, as Jess whispered:

"Chiquita?"

The *contrabandisto* nodded.

"The bandits had failed to kill her; maybe they were going to carry her away and sell her, as they sometimes did the girls in these days. She was a slip of a thing, a baby; and she was in the bear grass, hiding like a young quail, when Pedro found her."

He turned to Tom.

"What is it that is wrong?" he asked. For Jess had sprung to his feet and was hastening away.

"There is nothing wrong, my friend," Tom answered quietly. "And sometime I will tell you the end to your story." Then he too rose and hurried after Jess.

At the time, what with the Apaches being out and the poor roads, the mails were few and far between along the border. It was a good month later when Tom's first letter reached the little cattle town three hundred miles to the eastward, bringing to those two who waited back there its tidings of mingled joy and pain. The joy which came with mended fortunes, for the father; the little throb of pain which stabbed the mother's heart. For she was like every mother, on learning that her boy has found another woman whom he loves—another and a younger woman, to whom he will henceforth turn in sorrow or in happiness.

Code K

A stirring adventure of the secret service in its struggle with the mysterious and all-too-efficient Man with the Clubfoot.

By

VALENTINE WILLIAMS

Illustrated by Edward Ryan

I was dealt a terrific blow from behind; a wave of light danced before my eyes—and I knew nothing more.

"KILLING'S no murder" is the rule of war. But that means the war of the front line, where the individual combatant is no more than an impersonal unit of the whole striking force. It is a different thing to start out from London as I did, one night in 1917, to put a man to death in the staid and unemotional atmosphere of neutral Holland.

Not that I had any compassion for S-237. Thanks to his treachery, my poor friend, Philip Brewster, best and bravest of our little band of brothers in the British Secret Service, was lying in a nameless grave at Antwerp. More than this, as long as S-237 went free, the lives of a dozen more were at his mercy, to say nothing of our men at the front whose very security depended upon the reliability of our reports from the German back areas. S-237 had to die and I had no compunction about being the instrument of justice. But I do not mind admitting that, as my cab rattled me over the Amsterdam cobbles, the loaded pistol in my jacket pocket was like a weight on my heart.

S-237 was a figure of mystery. No one in our organization had ever set eyes on him; he had been engaged blind by reason of several excellent reports he turned in regarding conditions in occupied Belgium. He had stipulated that he would have nothing to do with our center in Holland. London, therefore, communicated with him direct under the name of Piet Arnholz at an Amsterdam address. It was generally inferred that the name, like the address, was of the accommodation order.

He traveled for us between Amsterdam and the towns of occupied Belgium and for a time proved extraordinarily useful. Then Code K, as the Germans called it, used by them in their radio communications between their espionage center at Amsterdam and Army Headquarters, came into our hands. We were in the habit of intercepting these radiograms which now we were able to decipher. Not for long, however. The Germans promptly became cognizant of the leak and changed their code. But not before we had obtained clear proof, from a message thus decoded, that S-237 was a double-crosser—that is, an agent in the pay of both sides.

Now the double-crosser is the commonplace of all secret-service work. One day we would lure an agent away from the Germans; the next day they would buy off a man of ours. Both sides commonly kept known double-crossers on their books for the purpose of feeding false information to the enemy. But S-237 was in a different category. We had trusted him; he knew too much; and so his removal was decreed.

We baited the trap with money, which is the only argument the international riffraff constituting the rank and file of secret-service organizations understands. Word was sent to S-237 that for the purpose of a personal interview an emissary was being dispatched to Amsterdam with the sum of three hundred pounds as a mark of appreciation. True to form came the answer back: S-237 would meet Captain Dunlop (an accommodation name which most of us at Headquarters used at one time or another) two days hence at the Café Monopol at four P. M.—the emissary to wear a flower in his buttonhole for easier identification.

With a red carnation in my coat I waited half an hour—an hour—for my man. The average double-crosser has his ear pretty close to the ground, and as time went on without anybody accosting me, I began to suspect that S-237 had caught a whisper of trouble brewing. I was not sorry for the respite. If I could have met the ruffian face to face, I told myself, the memory of poor Phil Brewster's fate would have sufficed to arm me with the neces-

sary resolution to go through with my mission. But this waiting got on my nerves, and I looked about for a suitable diversion.

I found it across the floor of the crowded café, not a dozen yards from where I sat. I must have been subconsciously aware, before focusing my attention upon her, that the woman was attractive, for suddenly I found myself studying her with interest. I liked little things about her—the way, for instance, her glossy, gold-brown hair was looped up over her ears and the half-moons that her long-fringed lashes made on her cheek as she bent her eyes to her newspaper. She was self-possessed and unassuming—quietly dressed, too, and with good taste. It seemed to me, once or twice, that she glanced up at me from behind her newspaper and then I had a glimpse of eyes luminous and compelling. On my way out of the café—at close on seven o'clock—her glove lay on the floor, and— Well, we had a drink together. She seemed to have no prudery—she was quite willing to talk to me. Her name, she said, was Marie Louise Hesselink and she was a Belgian refugee employed as a commercial traveler by a Hague milliner. And she had a way of looking at a fellow out of those large eyes of hers—

Quickly my mind was made up. Tomorrow, the Germans say, is also a day; time enough then to launch out upon the laborious search for S-237, if he had not already made himself scarce—we had ascertained that the address he had given us was merely a tobacconist's.

"Madame," said I, "I am a stranger in Amsterdam and so are you. Will anything be added to the meager store of human happiness by two aliens in this great city dining in separate loneliness?"

She laughed in her quiet way. "If you're asking me to dinner, I warn you I'll accept."

"That was the rough idea," said I. "And after dinner we'll find a music-hall, and see if we've forgotten how to laugh." Then she excused herself, explaining that she was staying with a girl friend and must telephone to say she would not be home for dinner.

We dined at an old-fashioned restaurant she knew of near the Bourse and afterward sat in a box at a funny little *café chantant*. Our conversation followed much the usual lines of conversation at such fortuitous encounters; that is to say, we gave one another our general background—in my case, somewhat imaginative—and then drifted from one topic to another. I had told her my name was Dunlop and that I had come to visit a friend of mine, one of the survivors of the Royal Naval Division interned at Amerongen and she described how, an orphan, working in a hat-shop at Ghent, she had fled before the German invasion and found refuge and a job in Holland.

My sole object in inviting her to dinner had been to take my thoughts for an hour or two off the business that had brought me across the North Sea; and in this I had certainly succeeded. But not in the way I had imagined. I soon discovered that this girl—she told me she was twenty-seven—was not just a little seamstress in search of adventure. She was highly intelligent and expressed herself well and while she did not apparently object to my flirting with her in a desultory fashion, she handled the situation with all the dexterity of a woman of the world. Her self-possession was extraordinary and she had a resolute air which intrigued me greatly.

After the theater I suggested a glass of beer at a café. But she explained that her friend would be waiting up. The house was close by; I might walk back with her, and if her friend had not gone to bed, I could have a drink with them at the flat. Curious as to how the adventure would end, I accompanied her to a gloomy old house on a canal at the back of the Town Hall. There, on the top landing, she produced a key and, bidding me wait a second, let herself in.

She was back in a moment, beckoning. In the hall she took my hat and ushered me into a dark sitting-room. I was in the act of entering when she called to me, "Just a minute!"

I turned to her casually.

Secret-service work quickens the intuitive sense and I was immediately aware of an air of tense excitement about her. Suddenly I scented danger; but it was too late; on the instant I was dealt a terrific blow on the head from behind—a tremendous impact but soft (the weapon was a rubber "life-preserver," I assumed afterward); a wave of scarlet light danced before my eyes—and I knew nothing more until the worst headache I have ever experienced restored me to consciousness.

I was lying on a bed in a small, darkened room. I felt weak and very sick. But as my senses cleared, my feeling of moral abasement transcended any physical sensation. I cursed myself for every kind of fool—to have let myself be lured into such an obvious trap was disgraceful! The girl, of course, was a decoy—S-237's decoy. He had simply dispatched her to the café to wait for the man with the flower in his buttonhole and bring him to where a hired bully, or perhaps S-237 himself, lurked in ambush. S-237 had turned the tables on me. I had come to kill him; but it looked to me as though our rôles were reversed!

My pistol had been taken from me; my wallet with the three hundred pounds in notes and my passport,—in the name of Dunlop,—were gone. The door was locked and a padlock secured the heavy shutter that barred the single window. My first impulse was to hammer on the door, cry out, vent in violence my exasperation which, to speak the truth, was rather against myself than my captors. But I mastered my feelings. Before I could grapple with my desperate situation I must know how the land lay. And the time to do it was now, while my captors believed me still unconscious.

The light that filtered through the shutter showed that it was broad daylight outside. I looked at my watch; it was twenty-five minutes past one. I must have lain there for more than twelve hours. I heard voices through the door—voices speaking German, a deep, guttural voice and a lighter voice which I recognized as the girl's. "He was still unconscious an hour ago," I heard her say. "We'll take another look if you like, but I expect he'll have to sleep it off."

"Jan struck too hard, the fool!" the deep voice grumbled. Now there were footsteps outside the door. I flattened myself against the wall so that the door in opening would conceal me. I reckoned they would go straight to the bed, giving me a chance to make a dash for liberty.

But the door opened only a few inches. The girl slipped in, a slim form in the dimness, and crossed to the bed.

Silently I laid my hand on the doorknob and silently drew the door toward me. But as I stepped around it I came into violent collision with a burly form. A harsh voice roared, *"Herr Gott!"* and a great hand drove at my chest, sending me reeling backward into the room. I sprang forward again, only to be brought up short by a brusque, "Still, or I shoot!"

A harsh voice roared, *"Herr Gott!"* and a great hand drove at my chest, sending me reeling.

It was not so much the threat or the long shining muzzle enforcing it, as I scrambled hastily to my feet, that halted me. A vast shape seemed to fill the whole doorway. Before me stood the notorious Dr. Grundt, ablest and most ruthless of the whole German corps of spies. Once again I marveled at the herculean proportions of the man, the tremendous span of that barreled chest, the swelling muscles of arms and back and the gorillalike suggestion of the head—the projecting, pointed ears, the wide, flat nose, the beetling, shaggy brows, the hot and savage eyes. Sheer surprise sent my wits racing to grapple for the connection between a cheap double-crosser like S-237 and his woman ally, and this man of authority who, as head of the Kaiser's personal Secret Service, was perhaps the most redoubtable of the powers behind the German throne.

He contemplated me in silence, his fleshy lips curled in a triumphant sneer, one enormous, hairy hand grasping the pistol, the other resting on the heavy cane he used by reason of the clubfoot which gave him his familiar nickname.

"Well, Herr Doktor," the girl spoke up behind me in a voice curiously defiant, "there he is! Captain Dunlop, one of their aces! Now do you believe me?"

With a large red tongue the cripple moistened his lips and nodded. "Good work, good work, *meine Liebe,*" he muttered. He hobbled a pace into the room. His dark eyes ferreted in my face. "Captain Dunlop, *hein? So!*"

Now, as you who read my reminiscences are aware, Clubfoot and I were not strangers. I was not disguised, and I had no doubt in my mind that he recognized me. But he gave no sign, and I had the impression that for some reason or other the old rascal wished my real identity to remain a secret between us.

The girl laughed. The sound struck chill upon my heart. She was a good actress; she had played her part perfectly. The thought that all her friendliness and sympathy had been assumed to trap me gave me a feeling of nausea. "A fool, like all Englishmen!" she jeered. "Well, Herr Doktor, what's he worth?"

Grundt chuckled softly. "He's worth more dead than alive, my dear, and that's a fact."

Her hard laugh rang out again. "Jan will take care of that. And no questions asked. But it'll cost you five hundred *gulden.*"

"Practical as always, my dear," he commented genially.

She snorted. "If you think that one can live on what you Germans pay—"

Grundt's eyes narrowed. "What time is your train?" he demanded brusquely.

Her face lit up. "Then I'm going on this mission?"

"Certainly."

"The Bâle express leaves at two." She glanced at her wrist. "If I hurry I can make it; my things are packed. What about the German frontier authorities?"

"Arranged. You have your German, Swiss and French visas?"

"Yes." She paused. "—And the cash?"

"Waiting for you at the other end."

She pouted. "I have only your word for it."

He laughed dryly. "You know my rule: cash on delivery. The money was wired this morning."

She shrugged her shoulders. "What about—" She glanced at me.

"You can leave—ahem—Captain Dunlop to me."

"Jan's about, if you want him," she said casually, and I felt a cold shiver go down my spine.

"Thank you. *Bon voyage,* my dear!"

"Au revoir, Herr Doktor!"

"Send me a postcard from Paris," he called after her.

With the closing of the door upon her, he turned to me. "And now, *lieber* Clavering, you and I must have a little talk. Sit down!" He produced a cigar-case. "Smoke?"

My head still ached violently. But simply to gain time I drew up a chair. I knew from experience that my old adversary was never more dangerous than when in these expansive moods. He gave me a light for my cigar, lit his own, and thoughtfully contemplating the glowing end, remarked: "And what about S-237, my friend?"

Taken aback as I was by his question, I made up my mind, on the spur of the moment, to lay my cards on the table. I reflected that the whole rabble of hireling spies stank in the nostrils of all who, like Grundt and myself, were in the game not for money but in the line of *duty;* besides, a double-crosser was a common danger.

"S-237 will betray you as he betrayed us," I answered resolutely. "If you want to know, I came to Amsterdam to put him out of the way."

The bushy eyebrows were drawn together in a sudden bewildered frown. "Then why didn't you?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "He didn't keep the appointment. And I was fool enough to take this girl of yours out to dinner."

Clubfoot laughed. *"So?* Well, I don't blame you—she's as clever as they make 'em. And how long has S-237 been working for you?"

"For more than three months."

The hot eyes flashed fire. *"So?* Any proof?"

"I had three hundred pounds for him in my wallet. Ask the girl what became of it."

The big German grunted and sawed the air with his hand. "Give me the facts!" he growled.

It afforded me a grim satisfaction to obey Grundt's request. I was careful, of course, not to give away any information of value; but I disclosed the fact that it was S-237 who enabled us to lay hands on the German spy Otto Riedl, who committed suicide in prison while under sentence of death. I did this with a purpose, for it was generally understood that Riedl's orders emanated from a very high quarter in Germany. At the mention of Riedl's name I saw Grundt's face darken.

When I had finished he was silent, his lips pursed up in thought. Outside the front door slammed. Clubfoot looked up quickly, his eyes spiteful, his features aflame with a sudden resolution. He took a pad from his pocket, scribbled a few lines, tore off the sheet and handed it to me. "That message goes by radio to our Army Headquarters this afternoon," he explained.

Much bewildered, I read: *"Kindly refund to me here the sum of ten thousand francs which I have asked Paris to pay out to M-44 on arrival."*

My glance questioned the heavy face.

"M-44 in the German service, S-237 in the British," said Grundt.

I stared at him. "You mean that this girl is— God, what a fool I've been!"

He glowered. "I told you she was clever! It was just as well you didn't guess. Frankly, would your British sense of chivalry have allowed you to kill a woman?"

"No," I told him.

Raspingly he cleared his throat. "Bah! *I* know no such scruples." He stood up. *"Mein lieber* Clavering, there's nothing I should like better than to hand you over to the tender ministrations of our friend Jan. But this is neutral ground and I have no intention of compromising its usefulness by creating difficulties for the Dutch authorities. Since you've told me what I came here to find out, you're free to go; but I suggest you return to England without delay."

I suppose he read the conflict of emotions in my face, for he added quickly: "You needn't worry about your mission. It will be accomplished." His tone was stern.

"How do you mean?" I faltered.

"You're doubtless aware that we've recently changed our code between Amsterdam and Army Headquarters?"

"Well?"

He clicked with his tongue impatiently. "Where are your eyes, my friend? Take another look at that message I showed you!"

I glanced at the sheet and then noticed, written across the corner: "For coding—Code K."

Then I knew that Grundt had taken my mission out of my hands, for anything sent by Code K would be read by the French and ourselves, so that that message was virtually the little lady's death-warrant. Sure enough, on returning to London next day, the first thing I heard was that the French were on the lookout for M-44 at the Swiss frontier of France. She was trailed to Paris, arrested, and sent before a court-martial—and two months later faced the firing-squad at Vincennes.

I have never been able to determine what action I should have taken, had I identified her as S-237 that afternoon at the Café Monopol.

REAL EX-

Nearly every one of us has had at least one thrilling adventure. (If you think your own most exciting experience worth describing, turn to page one of this issue for details of our prize offer.) Here five of your fellow readers tell of their most interesting experiences. The first, an Australian, narrates for you the story of a hazardous period, under the title—

Peril in the Solitudes

By **Jack McLaren**

IS there an evil spirit peculiar to the solitudes? Many savage races—Papuans, Solomon Islanders, Australian blacks—believe there is, which is why you will so seldom see a savage living or even journeying alone. They say that when a man lives apart from the company and protection of his fellows this evil spirit of solitude, resenting the intrusion of his domain, tries to destroy him.

Whether that is really so or not I do not know, but I do know that I once experienced a strange series of misadventures which were made extremely difficult and dangerous solely because I was utterly alone.

They happened in a little-known part of tropical Australia—Cape York, where, the only white man, I had a coconut-plantation. My only helpers were nomadic blacks who often went off wandering, sometimes for weeks on end, leaving me alone. On one of these occasions I had with me two dogs, a brown animal named Togo and a white one which I had named Snowy, both faithful creatures and very attached to me. I was well accustomed to these periods of solitude now, and for the first few days everything went along smoothly enough. Then one morning I decided to go off to a grassy islet that lay about a third of a mile out from the beach, there to do a little fishing. Leaving the two dogs ashore, I boarded my dinghy and set forth. It was just after sunrise, but already hot.

The rowing was hard, for the tide was against me, but at length I reached the islet, drew up the dinghy on the sand, and to make doubly sure drove in one of the oars for a stake and fastened the painter to it. Then I crossed the islet—a distance of maybe a hundred and fifty yards—to a spot where I knew the fishing was good, and set to work. I was using a cast-net and spear. For perhaps an hour I fished and then set back across the island to the boat.

But when I reached the place where I had left the dinghy it was gone—it was halfway back to the mainland, floating on the tide! Aghast, I stared at it, bobbing in the light of the early sun. Then I looked at the place where I had left it. Certainly the tide had risen since my arrival, but I hardly thought it had risen enough to float the dinghy

PERIENCES

off like that, to pull out the oar to which I had fastened it. For a moment I had an uncanny feeling that it had been done by a person. But very plainly there was no one on the island but myself; the place was little more than a sandbank, with every inch of it visible to me from where I stood. I just hadn't driven in the oar firmly enough.

It was a bad predicament; in the strip of sea between the mainland and me there were crocodiles and sharks. There was no water on the islet, and not even the last scrap of shelter from the blistering heat of the sun. Vessels rarely came this way; it might be weeks before one passed close.

I suddenly remembered what the savages had said about the evil spirit of the solitudes, and felt a strange terror which I fought off only with difficulty.

The hours passed slowly. Twice in the far distance the sail of a pearling lugger showed. I gathered some scraps of driftwood and made a smoke-beacon, wetting some of the wood in the sea to make it smoke as much as possible. But the sails slowly vanished.

As scanty protection from the terrible heat of the sun, I pulled up some of the grass that grew all about, spread it over a rough frame of sticks, and crawled under it. It was a very insecure shelter and the least puff of wind sent the grass flying, whereupon I had to gather it all up again; but it was better than nothing.

At other times I went and lay in the water. The first agonies of thirst were upon me and it was with great difficulty I resisted a temptation to drink of the salt sea-water.

Early in the afternoon another sail appeared; I stoked up my beacon-fire and waved my hat on the end of the spear in case anyone on the lugger should be aloft with the binoculars. But the sail passed on, as the others had done.

Thus the day passed, one of the most dreadful days of my life. The galvanized roof of my house shining in the sun across the strip of water, so near and yet so far, seemed to mock me. The dinghy had drifted on to a shore-reef down past the house a bit. Now and again there came the barking of my two dogs, a barking which clearly indicated they were puzzled by my absence. Now and again they came down to the beach, and followed my tracks to where I had boarded the dinghy; in the extraordinary clarity of the tropic sunshine I saw them quite clearly. By sundown I knew I could endure it no longer; I must take the dreadful risk of swimming back to the mainland!

Forthwith I took off my scant clothing, entered the water and struck out. I shall never forget that swim, in constant horror of sighting the approach of a dreadful fin, or the low dull eyes of a crocodile.

At length my foot touched the bottom and I crawled ashore. I had done it! For quite a while I lay exhausted on the sand above the tide-mark, overwhelmed by relief, while my two dogs leaped exuberantly about me in joy at seeing me again. . . .

In this way ended the first of the mishaps which were dangerous because I was alone.

The next happened a day or two later. I was bitten by a snake; the reptile was concealed in some old sacks which I was reaching down from a shelf, and like a flash it struck me in the back between the shoulder-blades, its fangs passing through the singlet I was wearing. It was a black snake, one of the deadliest kind of snakes in the region.

I ripped off the singlet in a frenzy. If ever I had been in need of a fellow human-being, it was then! The bite being where it was, a tourniquet was impossible, but a companion could immediately have sucked the wound of its poison—a most effective remedy, involving no risk to the person who thus brought the venom into contact with his mouth, because snake poison is only a poison when it enters the blood stream.

But being alone I did not know what to do. There was no pain, just a curious numbness around the bite. I tried to arrange a mirror so I could glimpse the bite, but with only partial success; thereupon I broke the mirror and with two of the largest pieces I so maneuvered that at length I was able clearly to see the mark. It was very slight; just two tiny punctures. The bites of some snakes made three or more punctures, but it was only the very deadly ones that made two. . . . I fought back my panic, for I needed my wits. The numbness around the bite was growing. There was some swelling, and odd little shooting pains began to radiate from it. Something would have to be done, and that very quickly.

I suddenly remembered I had a good supply of permanganate of potash, or Condy's crystals—a very good antiseptic. The next moment I had got my razor, which was of the old-fashioned handled-kind, and was doing my best to scarify the bite.

It was one of the most awkward tasks I had ever undertaken. To operate the razor on that bite between my shoulder-blades involved all manner of strange contortions. The flesh for a radius of several inches around the bite was scarified as much as the bite itself! My back was covered with blood. I discovered later that some of the cuts with the razor lifted out quite large pieces of flesh. But I did not feel that—compared with the greater horror of the snake-bite, such pain was nothing.

Then when I thought I had cut and scratched enough, I took the permanganate and by means of further contor-

tions I rubbed it into the scarifyings. The crystals, dissolving in the blood, made a dreadful mess, which dripped on to the floor and congealed there. The shooting pains had spread, also the numbness. I was suddenly sick—in a peculiarly helpless kind of way.

Faint and weak, I stopped, clinging to the table for support, with my heart beating in an oddly irregular way. Then I staggered to the door, intending to make for the water-bag which hung on the veranda.

I never reached it. The faintness welled up before me like a great black cloud, and I sunk to the floor.

The next I knew it was perhaps an hour later. The two dogs were sniffing at me, and one of them was licking my face. The shooting pains from the snake-bite had gone, and also much of the numbness and swelling. I got up weakly and had a long drink from the water-bag, then stumbled in and fell onto my bed. It seemed a miracle I had not succumbed to the bite of the snake.

My drastic self-treatment had helped, of course, but I was saved by the fact that the snake had bitten through my singlet, instead of directly into the bare flesh. Much of the venom had been expended on the porous material. It was, however, some days before I was fully recovered.

THE next in this strange series of misadventures happened at night, at the beginning of what was called the "big wind" season; for some days it had been blowing hard, with intervals of violent, twisting gusts, which splashed the seas high up on the beach, and here and there the tops of the jungle trees were sent flying. On the night of which I speak I awoke to hear one of the sheets of galvanized iron of my roof flapping. I rose hurriedly, took a hammer and some roofing-nails and "shinned" up one of the veranda posts on to the roof. It was imperative that I make that flapping sheet fast, for if it should blow off, there was nothing to prevent the rest of the roof going.

Now, if there had been two persons there, that flapping sheet could have been fastened down without much difficulty. But I was alone, and I have yet to find anything more awkward and difficult to handle than a sheet of galvanized iron, flapping and banging in a wind. I threw my weight on it, struggled with it, did my utmost to hold down a corner while I drove in a nail. It resisted me, flung me aside; it was like something alive, possessed of a furious energy of its own. I would get a nail half in, then the sheet would lift to the violence of the gusts and rip it out. More than once it slapped into my face and its sharp edge cut me. It was all I could do to avoid being flung off the slope of the roof to the ground.

There was rain in the wind now, hard, sharp rain, driving almost parallel with the earth, and almost blinding me when I faced it. Each minute it grew harder for me to hang on. I dropped the nails and they went slithering down the corrugations to the ground. I tried desperately to hold the sheet of iron in its place with my hands. It was no use. The gusts of wind grew fiercer; the sheet of iron flung out of my hands, now all cut and bleeding from its sharp edge. It tore clear away the few nails that held it, and went flying. A moment later the next sheet began to lift.

I made my way quickly to the ground. I could do nothing now, and it was far too dangerous up there on the roof.

The next twenty minutes was like a bombardment. Sheet after sheet went flying. As I stood looking at my now almost completely roofless house, with the rain pouring in on my possessions, I felt more utterly helpless than I think I had ever felt in the whole of my life.

The next two days I devoted to collecting the wayward sheets of iron and nailing them back to their place—which was no easy task, for many of them had been bent and battered through being flung against trees. Also, alone as I was, the matter of getting the sheets up on to the roof called for much ingenuity. The damage to the contents of my house was considerable—among other things a number of books, which to me in my solitude were among my most valued possessions, had been completely destroyed.

A LITTLE later, there was an occasion when I escaped a dreadful death only by a matter of inches.

It happened one bright morning when everything seemed calm and peaceful. At the edge of the plantation, and about three hundred yards from the house, was a jungle tree with a huge, half-rotted overhanging limb which if it fell would drop right across some young coconut-palms that had been planted near by. I determined to fell the tree back into the jungle and so remove this danger from the young palms. Accompanied by my two dogs, I took an ax, went to the tree, and set to work.

I have had a good deal of experience as an axman and within about an hour had chopped through on both sides to the point where it needed only another cut or two to bring the tree crashing down.

I paused a moment to see that all was in order, whistled my dogs safely out of the way, then swung the ax and gave the tree two final cuts. It groaned, quivered, creaked, and began to fall. I started to step aside, but at that moment the tree gave a jump and a twist, as jungle trees of what is called "springy wood" are sometimes inclined to do, so altering the angle of its fall as to bring it directly above me. I bounded for safety, but tripped on a ground-vine and went sprawling on my face. The next instant the tree came crashing down, its great trunk fairly across me.

What saved me from being smashed to a pulp was the fact that I had fallen into a depression in the ground. It was only a few inches deep, but enough to keep off me the whole weight of the tree.

But I was held a prisoner; the tree pressed on me just enough to hold my body immovable. My head and arms were free, but my shoulders were held as though in a vise.

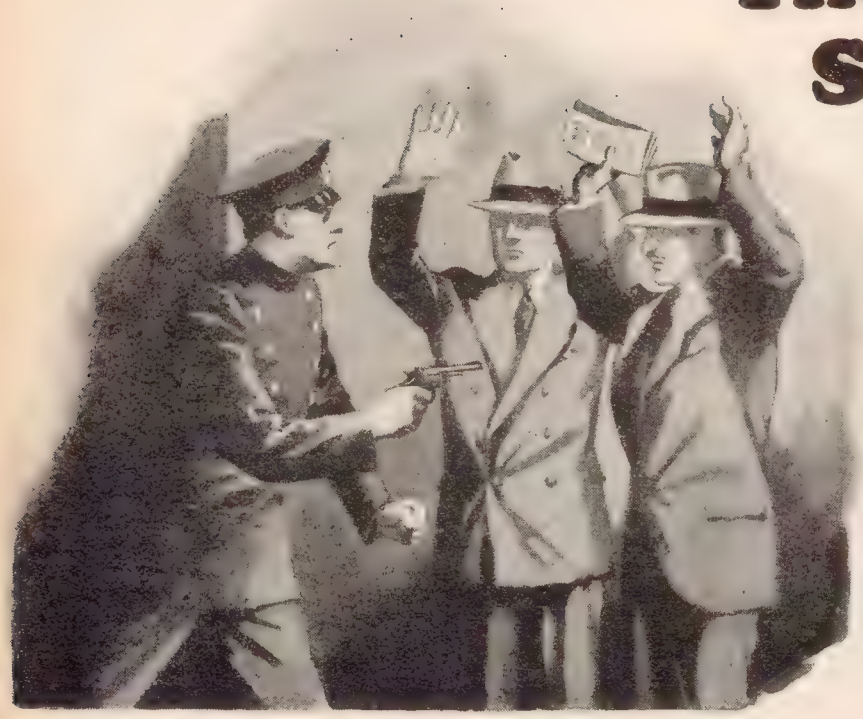
My two dogs came up, sniffing and licking. Togo sat up on his haunches and began to howl, while Snowy barked loudly. But there was no one near; I had to get out of this dreadful situation as best I could by myself. Helpers would have got me out easily enough, either by cutting off the head of the tree and then with poles for levers rolling the trunk off me, or by digging away the earth from under me so that I could crawl out. As it was, the only thing I could do was to scratch a way out with my hands.

It was a task which took I know not how many hours. The ground was not hard, having a lot of sand in it, but it was intersected with roots—vine-roots, grass-roots, and roots of saplings. I had to break and twist them off as best I could. Fortunately none of them was very thick; it was their toughness which made it difficult.

The two dogs helped. Seeing me scratching, they scratched also. I am positive they were trying to get me out. They burrowed in under the tree close to me. They were intensely eager, and now and again when I paused for a rest one or the other would come and lick my hand or face as though to encourage me. The very presence of those dogs helped me tremendously; I don't think I had realized before how valuable the companionship of a dog could be.

The arduous work went on, till at length I was able to move my shoulders a little, then a little more, and finally to drag myself out from under the tree. On seeing me free once more, the dogs capered about me, dashed this way and that, their ears flatly back, uttering little yelps of delight and leaping up on me like things possessed. But for a long time I just stood there, leaning against a stump, overcome by a feeling of heartfelt gratitude. Yes, I know about the peril of the solitudes!

The Stock Swindle



Wherein a young stock-salesman is asked to join in a crooked scheme—and instead aids the police to catch the criminals.

By **Jonathan Oldfield**

THE ringing of the telephone one hot Sunday night aroused me from a sound slumber and as I resentfully picked up the receiver, the call turned out to be from a man I had known the year before down on the "Street," a dapper little Greek customer's man by the name of Darklos. It was very important, he stated, that he see me at the first opportunity. Could I meet him tomorrow evening at his hotel?

In the privacy of his little room the following night, Darklos dramatically announced that he had an option on a large block of a certain stock at a price well below the prevailing market. There was, however, a condition that prevented him from acting on this opportunity at once—the stock must be disposed of outside of New York. It was for this reason that he wished to see me. Could I help him market a part of the block in some city such as Boston, Cleveland or St. Louis? If I could, a profit of at least fifteen or twenty thousand dollars awaited me.

Twenty thousand dollars! Even in boom days this was a large sum. But I asked Darklos why it was necessary to seek out-of-town outlets. The stock in question, I reminded him, was listed on Exchange and could be sold at any time through any of a hundred brokerage houses.

"Come, John," I finally demanded, "what's the matter with this proposition?"

"Well," he reluctantly admitted, after some hesitation, "the stock is phoney, if that's what you mean."

"You can count me out!" I angrily said, and I turned on my heel and left him.

Next day the incidents of the previous evening still preyed on my mind. Did a block of this counterfeit stock actually exist? Should I forget the whole matter, or report what I knew to the proper authorities?

Finally I entered the white stone doorway of a police station, climbed the iron stairs to the detective division and there told my story to the lieutenant in charge of detectives.

The officer at once telephoned the head of the Stock Exchange Bureau of Investigations and in a few minutes the detective and I were seated in the Stock Exchange official's office, where I related my experience.

The Stock Exchange official then stated that it was his belief that I had stumbled on something of extreme importance. It might be, he declared, that I had brought to light the renewed activities of a notorious counterfeiting ring, well known to the police and wanted by them.

He described how two of the detectives had crossed wires last spring with a Department of Justice operative, just a few minutes before their own trap was to be sprung, and mentioned the fact that Tilane, the ringleader, was now out on bail because of insufficient evidence against him. Would I, he asked me, follow up this lead and attempt to find out the identity of the men with whom Darklos was dealing? I consented.

That afternoon I joined the detectives at the Hotel Flanders, where they had their headquarters, and a plan was mapped out for the coming campaign. A fictitious uncle was created for me who was in a position to purchase a large number of shares of the stock in question. This uncle of mine, who lived in St. Louis, would instruct his bank in New York to accept and pay for the stock upon its delivery. His name was to be "John Rolston."

With this realistic setting behind me, I visited Darklos next evening and told him that I had reconsidered my decision to have nothing to do with his proposition. I insisted, however, that I do business with the principals only, but should the deal work out to my satisfaction, he would receive ten per cent of the profit I made. This counter-proposal met with Darklos' instant approval, and he gave me a card to a Walt Smith (an assumed name) to whom, he explained, he would speak the next morning.

For the next two or three days Smith and I were busy arranging the details. It was finally decided that the project would be on a much safer basis if a loan could

be made with the stock as collateral. This would eliminate, to a certain extent, the serious danger of the fraud's being detected when the stock eventually went through for transfer. The chances were, I assured Smith, that my uncle would keep the certificates just as they were when received from New York.

A day or so later, when I entered the speak-easy where I was to meet Smith, I noticed three strangers talking to him, two of whom arose as I neared the table, and sauntered slowly over to the end of the bar. The third man, a short, dark-haired Italian, remained at the table with Smith.

As I took my seat at the little table, I recognized that swarthy Latin face. It tallied exactly with a picture the detectives had shown me. He was Tilane, the head of the ring! Rapidly and with a slight accent Tilane told me that the arrangement made with Smith was altogether too much of a risk. Any transaction made must be made for cash. If I could in some way get the necessary cash in advance from my uncle, he was sure that a deal could be arranged. With the promise that I would wire my uncle immediately, I hurriedly left to report the news.

On the afternoon of October twenty-first Smith called and asked me to meet him at a hotel. There he informed me certificates for 320 shares of the stock were ready and wanted to know if I had succeeded in raising the cash. When I told him that the money—twenty-nine hundred dollars—was in my hotel safe, he asserted that he and his companions must see the cash first.

Finally it was decided that we were to meet at Sixth Avenue and Forty-first Street at eleven-thirty that night. There I was to show Smith the cash, and within a few minutes thereafter we would put through the deal.

By the time I returned to the hotel, the detectives had succeeded in obtaining about five hundred dollars in cash and were busily engaged in making this sum resemble a formidable roll.

"Don't let Smith handle the money," cautioned the older detective with a broad grin, "and remember, this may possibly be a plain stick-up; so wherever you go, keep as close as you can to the curb. When you are certain that the stock is going to be given to you, just put your hand to the back of your head, and we'll do the rest."

At eleven-fifteen, admittedly nervous, I stepped from a police car at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street and walked west to Sixth Avenue.

As I impatiently waited for Smith's appearance, I recognized with great satisfaction the reassuring figure of one detective reclining on a bench in Bryant Park and other familiar forms moving slowly about in the dim light of the Sixth Avenue street-lights.

IN just a few moments, which seemed almost hours, a voice called to me from a doorway, and Mac, the big bartender of the speak-easy that Smith owned, came up to where I was standing.

"Jack's waiting over on Forty-second for us. Let's go," he said. Slowly we walked up to the corner and then turned toward Broadway. About halfway down the block I saw Smith beckoning to us from across the way.

There, in the glare of a lighted shop-window and not ten feet from a car containing two detectives, my trembling fingers clumsily drew forth the roll. For a moment I thought surely Smith was going to ask me to count it. Then a sigh of relief nearly escaped me as he finally nodded and said: "Now take a little stroll with Mac, here—everything's set." With this parting remark he crossed the street hurriedly and suddenly disappeared from our sight.

With Mac in the lead, I returned to the corner and then headed down Sixth Avenue. As I walked along by the side of the bartender, it seemed almost certain that the loud beat of my heart rose above the roar of the occasional "L" trains above us. As one street and another was reached and passed, the sight of familiar figures began to have a soothing effect on the nervousness which dogged each step. I noticed two men as we neared Thirty-seventh street, standing close to a darkened store-window. They turned as we passed them and stared for a second. Both I recognized as friends of Tilane's.

Something was going to happen now, I knew, as Mac and I passed without a word of recognition and halted on the opposite corner. For a few seconds we stood there; then Mac asked me to wait for a moment; and recrossing the street, he joined the two on the corner. After a brief conversation, the heavier and darker of the pair crossed over to me. "Here you are," he said, and held out a folded paper and magazine that were under his arm.

For a few seconds I waited for Smith's appearance—then I slowly raised my hand to the back of my head.

SUDDENLY a hard voice behind us demanded: "What are you fellows doing around here this time of night?" We both jumped, I as startled as the man beside me, and I found myself looking up into the unsmiling face of a detective.

"Up with your hands and get over by the wall there," he commanded. Other figures suddenly were running about in the semi-darkness. For a few seconds all I could see were flashing brass buttons and gleaming revolvers. Then the next thing I knew in the confusion I was standing with arms upstretched against a wall, with Mac and the two men beside me.

From the surrounding circle of detectives and patrolmen which faced us, my friend the older officer stepped forward and spoke to the man who a few minutes before had spoken to me.

"What have you got in your hand?" he asked.

"Just a little reading matter," was the answer.

"Where did you get them?" the officer demanded.

"I found them on Thirty-eighth Street," the man of the corner replied.

"Give me the newspaper!" was the next command.

Carefully the detective turned over each sheet. Slowly as each page was turned and nothing happened, beads of perspiration began to stand on my forehead.

The officer then seized the magazine from the upraised hand, and without waiting to examine each page of the book, held it close to our faces and violently shook it.

Four crisp stock-certificates fell to our feet.

For nearly a second not a word was said.

Then a detective reached for the man and violently shook him. "Now, where did you get them?" he triumphantly demanded.

From the chattering teeth of this individual came the admission that he had received them from Smith.

Just as the next man was about to be questioned, I was suddenly yanked through the circle of officers. A grinning face was beaming down on me, and my hand was enthusiastically being shaken by my detective friends.

"It is all over now," said one of them. "I only hope the boys picked up Walt Smith. We've at last got a dandy case against Tilane."

All three men are now in the Tombs. Mac is being held as a material witness. The man who carried the stock certificates was indicted and held for trial. His companion, also indicted for the same offense, is now in Washington facing two murder investigations. A warrant has been issued for Smith's apprehension to face his indictment. As for Tilane, his bail has been called, and a thousand dollars' reward is now offered for his arrest.

A Sky Duel

The terrific adventure of an American balloon observer shot down by an enemy airplane, pursued in his parachute—and still fighting back to very good effect indeed.

By **Paul Neibling**

IT was foggy and damp, a chill dampness that seeped through my fur coat and heavy fur mitts. Above swayed the bulging belly of a French observation-balloon. Two thousand feet below was the ground and Brouville, France. Looking down I could see the mooring-cable as it stretched off into the greasy fog-bank.

To pass the time and occupy my mind I examined the awkward harness that fastened me to the parachute. Then I examined the 'chute itself, or as much of it as I could. The silken spread was contained in a large inverted cone which was suspended on the side of the balloon basket. This was on the morning of September 2, 1918, and at that date all observation-balloons were equipped with parachutes, which sometimes opened and sometimes didn't.

The French had called for American officers to serve in the French balloon service. I had volunteered. Two weeks of training had made me an observer, although I knew little, if any, French. Two months had made me a veteran. Two more minutes might make me a corpse.

Great tendrils of fog wisped by the basket. A little wind had stirred. That meant the fog would clear a bit. Sure enough, in a few minutes I caught a glimpse of the earth. Then something happened that sent the blood surging through my arteries in mad jumps.

I could hear the roar of an airplane motor. Closely I scanned the sides of the fog-banks which hemmed me in.

Then, as though they were phantom planes flashed on a motion-picture screen, two German ships slipped out of the clouds about two hundred feet to my left and put some fast bursts into the inflammable bag over my head.

I jumped out of that basket as though it were a hot skillet. Whether the parachute would open or not didn't occur to me at the minute. Then the balloon went up in a great flash of yellow and blue flame, and the parachute harness tightened under my arms and legs, as it opened.

I could see the two planes, like a perfectly trained team of fire-horses, swinging back. Perhaps those two planes would come close enough for a picture.

With fumbling hands I pulled the box from my pocket and opened it, training the camera on the closer of the two ships. On the ground glass of the camera I could see the snub nose of one German plane. I could see something else, too. Tracer bullets were winging directly toward me! The enemy was going to shoot me down casually while I dangled helplessly in the shrouds of the 'chute.

Three times I snapped the shutter, then shoved the camera into the front of my flying-suit and jerked out my automatic, determined that I wouldn't go down without an attempt to defend myself.

Even as I pulled up my arm to fire I could feel the camera sliding down my wide trouser leg. One downward glance; I glimpsed the camera on its drop to the ground.

I had no more time to give the matter of a lost camera; all my attention was needed in steadying the pistol as I poured shot after shot in the general direction of the enemy plane. Around and around it circled like an angry wasp. Once on every round the pilot winged in to pour a shower of frothy tracers, entirely too close.

My gun was empty when I reached the ground, but I was unharmed, and I shook my fist at him as he sped away.

My first thought was for my camera. I found the box had not been ruined by the fall. The film was still good and I got three excellent pictures, two of them showing the white streaks of tracer bullets from the German's machine-gun.

It was twenty-four days later—September 26, 1918—that my companion observer and junior officer (Lieutenant C. Carroll of Garrett, Indiana) and I were doing an early morning observation in an effort to direct fire on Sivry-sur-Meuse in the Argonne sector.

It had been three-thirty A.M. when we started our trick. Routine work of directing fire continued until two-thirty in the afternoon. To our right swung another large captive balloon; to our left two of the big bags helped us with our vigil. We were some forty-five hundred feet from the ground.

It is impossible to use glasses or binoculars from the baskets of the big balloon. The continual sway and change of altitude sends the landscape past the end of the glass in an indistinguishable blur.

I didn't need glasses, however, to see a little "hound of hell," a Pfalz scout-plane, flying at a low altitude and parallel to the front lines. I watched it for a few seconds, then turned to draw Carroll's attention. The ship was now blasting along at top speed, almost on the ground and headed directly for the balloon farthest to our left.

The tiny ship's nose came up. The fixed gun spat a storm of deadly incendiaries into the bag. The huge gas-container blossomed out immediately in a terrific flash of flame, and the two observers went over the side. Their parachutes opened perfectly and my fingers bit into the side of the basket as the plane swooped onto the balloon next to ours like some winged dragon of old, a stream of tracers flaming from its snout.

There was a huge burst of black smoke, lined with brightly glowing flames, as the monster of the skies went to her doom. But she was not alone. Just as Cleo Ross, her senior officer and a friend of mine, went over the side the burning balloon closed about him, and a shroud of livid flame carried him to a terrible death.

Far over to our right I caught sight of an American Spad gunning our way at full speed. Would he get there in time to save us?

The German hesitated a moment, banked up on one wing the better to observe the falling balloon, then headed for us. His first burst screeched through the bag, but she didn't catch fire.

Then, like a swooping hawk, the Yank slid out onto the enemy's tail.

The German was taken by surprise. I could see him twist in the cockpit, give a hurried glance, squeeze farther down, then throw his plane into a violent bank. The American was ready for him and matched trick for trick. It was a savage game of tag, with death for the loser. Each instant threatened to find one of the two plunging headlong into the bag over our heads.

Our basket rocked from the tornadolike blast of the propellers as they churned the air into a torrent under our very noses. Then the German went into a short dive, up and over. He had looped with the bag as the center of his desperate maneuver. But he wasn't alone; the American followed as though pulled by a tow rope.

As the Pfalz leveled off after this mad maneuver its pilot gave his ship every bit of power behind his whirling prop, and scudded for the Fatherland at a pace which soon left the slower ship of the Yank behind.

AN hour passed; fog began to gather at our own height. This was indeed dangerous, for it would permit an enemy plane to come upon us unobserved. And far below were the doughboys and cannon, depending on us to do our part in this biggest of all drives.

Out of the ghostly fog-bank, not a hundred yards to our left came a tiny battling Fokker, the meanest plane in the war. A wing-span of thirty feet is all that prevented this ship from being an aërial torpedo. It could fly rings, circles and triangles around anything on our Front.

In a split second he was in deadly earnest, his plane diving at us, his single gun vomiting flame. Luckily, his first aimed burst went between us and the balloon. But he whirled like a swallow, and this time I could see the incendiaries knifing into the bag. It would burst into flame any minute.

"Quick," I shouted to Carroll. "Jump!"

Without a word he jumped.

I flashed a glance upward. The bag wasn't even smoking. Perhaps it wouldn't burn, I thought, and I stopped with one leg over the side of the basket. Still, the big bags rarely burned at the instant they were fired on. It was the smoldering flame, brushed from the bullet, and which clung to the fabric, that sent the big sausages up in a roaring furnace of flame when the inflammable gas poured from the wound.

Without giving it much thought, I pulled my pistol and looked about for the German. He had ceased his attack for the minute and was circling near the balloon, as he waited for it to go up in fire. Down he came within thirty yards of the basket, and I let him have it, shooting point-blank with my automatic.

He scudded for safety; then he was back. The stubby nose of the plane jerked up and poured a livid stream of tracers into the gaping belly of the balloon. I jumped.

Down I went, end over end, the clumsy French parachute trailing out after me, my pistol still firm-clutched in my hand. I dropped for a hundred feet or so; then the thing opened. Then I noticed that the German had attacked the single remaining balloon, while my balloon was falling in flames. While I stared, the fourth bag flared up and the observers went floating down in their 'chutes.

EVIDENTLY those shots of mine, fired from the basket's edge, had angered the German, for, vengeance-bent and with his guns chattering a dirge of hate, he banked about and came straight for me. Again I was a target while I hung helpless in my parachute harness.

Closer and closer he came, his snub-nosed plane pointing directly at me. There was a distinct *snap* above the roar of the plane and the chatter of the machine-gun—then another. Two of my 'chute cords had been cut by his bullets. I slipped off to one side, my falling speed increasing, just as the Fokker flashed by at my level.

It seemed I could have reached out and touched him with a fishpole, he was so close. Swinging in the shroud-cords to follow the trajectory of his flight, I pumped five bullets from my pistol. Then the gun jammed and I worked like a madman with the mechanism, one eye on the German, who had failed to slacken his wild speed.

I was frenziedly laboring with the refractory gun when I noticed that there was something wrong with the Fokker. It wabbled from side to side; then the nose tilted down—slowly at first, then faster. The prop churned madly under full throttle and the tiny ship went into a tight spin.

Down, down, it plunged. I could scarcely believe my eyes. The jammed gun hung at my side, forgotten. I had downed a Fokker with a .45!

Fascinated, I watched the wild descent, and resisted an urge to cry aloud. The undercarriage and prop seemed to hit the ground at the same time, and the sturdy little ship melted down to the level of the grass-blades from the terrific driving force of the motor and the dive. In that slightly slanted position the ship did not skid even an inch.

Then I was forced to give all my attention to the matter of the broken 'chute-cords which were spilling entirely too much air and giving me a dangerous falling speed.

Climbing the cords on the same side as those which had been cut by the German's bullets, I managed to get the 'chute billowing out and lit without injury—feet-first, but with a hard jar.

My first thought was for the plane and the pilot. The plane was scarcely recognizable as a former fighter of the air. It looked more like some wood and canvas spread over a mudhole for the doughboys to cross on. The motor was buried in the ground and the whole mass of wreckage badly charred from the fire that had broken out when the ship hit the earth. The pilot was not recognizable as anything human.

I was unable to get definite proof that it was my bullet which brought the plane down. It really doesn't matter. Accounts had been evened—and I'd had an adventure that the years can't rub out.

Overboard in a Hurricane

The terrifying grip of a hurricane was no joke to this surveyor—although his guide may have thought otherwise.

By **William H. Lamb**

IT was the time of year for Caribbean hurricanes; but as a new gringo, not having passed through a hurricane season on the Honduran coast, I did not realize what these tempests could do, and usually did do, to a small sailing vessel. However, I was soon to find out.

While living at La Ceiba, Honduras, I was instructed to go to a certain location some twenty miles from a place called Port of Iriona, to make a land-survey for the Honduran Government.

Should you look at the map of Central America, you would see that the northern coast of Honduras runs in practically a straight east and west line—that there is a chain of three islands roughly parallel to the coast, located some twenty odd miles out from the mainland, and that my destination was about one hundred and twenty or thirty miles due east from La Ceiba. This trip must be made against both a strong ocean current and the constant tradewinds from the east. Therefore one usually sails east by tacking between the mainland and the islands.

George Hulse—called "Horta"—my guide and interpreter, a strong youth of reddish black color, whose mother was a Jamaica black and whose father was a white man, was noted in this section for his bravery, endurance, knowledge of country and languages; he stoutly urged that we take passage on a certain schooner, an old Maine fishing schooner about forty feet long, a heavy, slow-sailing affair, but considered very seaworthy.

We sailed about the middle of an afternoon of a clear day, for the island of Roatan, with a hold-load of rum, flour, canned goods and salt, and a deck-load of nine or ten human beings, including two pretty half-breed girls with their father. I was the only white person on board.

All went smoothly, and we dropped anchor at Roatan just a little before dark, and everyone went ashore except two of the crew—Carib sailors, who stayed on board as guards. Horta and myself had a supper of bananas, bread-fruit and fish as guests of the American consular agent, whose wife, a half-breed, chased the chickens and dogs out of a room and made a place for us to spread our blankets and hang our mosquito-bars for the night.

During the night the weather turned bad, with heavy rain and northeast wind; and in the morning the sea was rough and uninviting. It was with difficulty that the portion of cargo destined for this place was unloaded and a few small barrels of coconut-oil loaded for shipment, although we were in a protected coral-formed cove.

To go or not to go was now the question. Horta—who, it seemed, was born without any sense of fear—was all for shoving off at once. Our captain was not so sure, and the Caribs predicted certain disaster.

It was finally decided to go. Two or three stayed at Roatan, but about an equal number were to go.

We hoisted just a little sail, slipped out of the cove into open water—and then the fun began. It was far rougher than any of us thought; I was not only plenty sick, but plenty nervous. However, under the prodding jeers and laughter of Horta, the captain kept our course set for Trujillo. About an hour out, it began to get very rough, and the wind was reaching gale proportions. Horta finally lost control over the captain's already weakened nerves, and the captain swung the boat around toward the Island. As this maneuver was executed, however, the wind caught the wrong side of the sail—and bang! about half the mast-rings were either torn loose from the sail or broken. The sail bagged out and almost knocked two or three overboard. The girls began to scream and cry; a few began to pray to their protecting saint, while the Caribs began whistling a sort of tune that is supposed to lay the wind. The rest of us started cussing.

Horta grabbed the helm and took complete charge. Looking at me, laughing, he yelled: "This is a bum joke!" Then he began giving orders in English, Spanish, Carib and Indian. He put the captain and Caribs to work on the sail, and held the boat headed back to our port of departure—Roatan. We fairly flew into the cove, for the wind was straight behind us, and what a wind! But in an hour or so the storm was practically over, and by noon it was clear, the wind was back to the normal tradewind.

Horta and the captain got hold of a few motley looking fellows who called themselves shipbuilders, and at once they went busily to work repairing the damage.

By about nine o'clock next morning the boat was reported in good shape again, and we all gathered on board with some additional islanders, a total of thirteen people. The day seemed beautiful, and all were happy. We sailed

slowly out to sea, headed for Trujillo. One of the Caribs tied a red rag to a large hook and tossed it overboard to trawl for barracuda; Horta and I sat aft on the deck watching the line.

In about an hour the wind suddenly fell. Horta rose, climbed the mast ladder, and sat aloft for quite a while. He then came down, spoke to the captain in Spanish, then came to me and said: "Bill, I don't like this. I'm afraid this is sure enough a bum joke." I inquired whether he thought we would get more wind, and he said: "That's the trouble. I think we're going to get a hurricane!"

"You trying to scare me?"

"Scare, nothing!" he answered. "You do as I say, and we will be all right; and I'm going to do something now!" He went aloft again, but came down like a monkey, shouting orders. The captain looked scared to death. The sail hung perfectly limp, and as I looked around, I could just see the island and the mountains on the mainland.

THEY let down the sail, tied it fast, and wound the anchor-chain around the base of the mast; then they opened the hatch and began unloading the barrels, throwing them overboard. I asked Horta what that was for, and he said: "Everything goes over but the stuff in the bags. You don't want the hull busted, do you?" Pointing straight east, he said: "Look, she's coming!" and with that, went below and brought out our duffle-bags. These are strong cotton bags covered with rubber sap and smoked. They have a strong cord attached, and can be so folded and tied as to become air- and water-tight. They are used both as a carry-all and life-preserver. He threw away a lot of our stuff in them, blew them up and tied each man's to his arm, each of us putting his gun and hunting-knife in his belts. I noticed the captain and one Carib doing the same. There were no other bags in sight. Horta then ordered everyone to get hold of something. Then pandemonium broke loose. Horta said: "Stick close to me as possible; and we must both stick to the boat. Whatever you do, don't get away from the boat, because she won't sink, since she's practically empty and all wood."

As it was still a dead calm, and only a little black cloud on the horizon, I felt as if somebody, maybe Horta, had gone crazy; indeed I told him so, and how! Finally the natives began to calm down and quit praying and moaning. Horta kept watching the cloud as it grew, higher and blacker, and turning to me, he said: "Now look out for a tough time." Then he began to sing!

In a few minutes a stiff wind began to blow, seemingly from all quarters at once.

The captain called Horta, and they both took the tiller, and I saw they were trying to head her southwest toward the mainland. But now things began to happen. I worked my way to the mast ladder to have something to hold to, and both Horta and the captain left the tiller and came over to me. Then I saw they had the tiller tied down.

Several big swells went under us, and then a veritable mountain of water came rolling along. We went up, up and up, as though in an elevator; then—*swish!* What happened I'll never exactly know. My next realization was that of great pressure on my body and something pulling my arm. I could feel, also, that I was rushing through the water. Then all of a sudden I came to the surface, and with salt-stung eyes tried to look around, but I could not hold my eyes open. Above the solid surface of water was a layer of flying spray, with great shreds or masses hurtling through the air, which when hitting my head felt like a padded club. The shriek and roar of the wind was indescribable.

After a time, I know not how long, the water stopped flying, and I could look around me in a sort of twilight. My heart bounded when I saw the bottom of the boat a short distance away, and then I saw a few heads and bags on the surface.

The roar of the wind ceased almost as suddenly as it begun, and the light got stronger. I could breathe air instead of spray, and I saw some one's arm waving—later I saw it was Horta waving me toward him. I tried to swim, but after a few strokes could do no more, as I was utterly exhausted. However, the gods were with me, for I realized that the current was taking me toward the boat, which I reached in a few minutes. There I found the captain and the two Caribs, but the others were all gone. How the Carib had lived without a bag is a mystery!

Believe it or not, Horta looked at me, and laughing, said: "This is a hell of a bum joke." Then he inquired if I were hurt, and for some reason I could not speak, so only shook my head. He said no more, but drew his knife from his belt, and catching the rolling boat on an average level, stuck the knife in the hull as a sort of handhold, then took his gun, and drove the knife solid, hitting it each time it would roll into reach. This done, he said, "Give me your knife and hold to this one," and after a time I managed to do so.

We stayed at the boat for hours and hours, rapidly drifting west and slowly toward the mainland shore, Horta and I talking but little, while the others jabbered constantly. The sea was running high, and by late afternoon we were only a few hundred yards from the beach, and possibly fifteen miles west of where we were wrecked.

I was a sorry sight. Both hands and arms, as well as my legs and hips, were raw and bleeding from holding the knife and scraping up against the barnacle-covered old hull. The others, partaking of the nature of a fish, apparently, seemed in pretty good shape.

Horta and the others started a great powwow in Spanish, while I was busy trying to keep alive. Horta turned to me and said: "Bill, you take my gun and bag, as we are going ashore; then I will come back and get you. . . . Now, here's what you do. When you see us on shore, hold both bags and leave the boat, and we'll do the rest."

They struck out for shore. And then for the first time I saw they were all barefoot. The Caribs live that way, but later I learned that the captain and Horta had left their shoes on the boat.

A FEW minutes later Horta was standing on the shore waving his arms at me—the others had gone into the bush. I kicked off from the end of the boat, and slowly drifted away. The two guns seemed pulling me down, so I pulled out my shirt and let Horta's go, as I had stuck it down in my shirt. This helped.

After I had drifted quite close to the roaring breakers, when on top of a swell, I could see them doing something on the beach. I saw that Horta had his shirt off; then he plunged into the surf, and was lost to view until I next saw him swimming slowly, and seemingly with great effort, toward me. He looked tired and weak, so I worked toward him with all of the little strength I had left, thinking to give him a bag, and he needed it. We finally got together, and then I saw that he had a large loop made out of his shirt, tied to the end of a tiger-claw vine (they grow a thousand feet long) which he gave me, helped loop it under my arms, and then took his bag.

Those on shore began hauling me in, Horta following close behind. When I got through the undertow, I was about half dead. Eight of the thirteen who set sail with us had gone to Davy Jones' locker. . . .

You wonder about the survey? Well, a few weeks later we went there by motorboat. My mother's little son Willie had had enough of sailboats for two forevers.

Facing a Jungle Tiger

Was this man lucky? You can judge for yourself, after reading this actual happening.

By **Don F. Taylor**

I ONCE spent four years as associate trapper with Heri Bogue, for Carl Hagenbeck of Hamburg, Germany. And from 1924 to 1926 I had experience as a hunters' guide in French Indo-China. But it was on the Reed Asiatic Expedition from Los Angeles, California, that I came near meeting my doom with tigers, in the province of Annam, French Indo-China.

We were out to get specimens for the museums as well as for Mr. Reed's private collection, and to take motion-pictures portraying the dangers of the jungle.

We had pitched our tents in an open clearing on the uplands about a mile from a native village. Out of grass and poles we built a hut for our kitchen and another one near by, in which to house our dogs.

Since I had previously spent the greater part of two years in this locality I had learned the Annamite language and was able to converse freely with the natives. I learned that tigers were numerous, and there were a couple of man-eaters among them. When a tiger has once tasted human flesh he becomes a deadly menace to the natives. It is not safe to wander far from the village from late afternoon until after eight o'clock in the morning. These are the hours when the tiger does most of his hunting; then he takes to his lair deep in the jungle and sleeps during the heat of the day.

I immediately sent out messengers to all the chiefs of the villages to notify us whenever they saw a tiger in any locality. The tiger usually confines his prowling to a territory covering only one or two square miles until he has exhausted the game in that locality.

After being informed that tigers frequented certain spots we set out to make clearings there and set up bush *bomas* in which to conceal ourselves with the camera. It is necessary to make a clearing in which to stake your kill securely, because the tiger always drags his kill into the bush to eat it if he can.

We found that dogs are of great assistance in hunting tigers, especially if you want to get motion-pictures of them before they decide to charge or try to escape. A pack of well-trained dogs can keep a tiger at bay with exciting action long enough to grind out many feet of film.

In our pack of dogs were six well-trained Kentucky hounds, three Airedales and three shepherd dogs, they were all dogs of exceptional courage. Not all dogs have the courage to tackle a tiger. In fact most dogs, when they catch the scent of a tiger, will pinch their tails between their legs and run for cover.

It was not long before we had encountered five tigers. We had taken motion-pictures of all of them, fighting with the dogs, before we shot them.

In a deep ravine where the natives said a man-eater had his haunt, we staked a kill and built a *boma*. One day we came to the kill, and knew from its mangled appearance that a tiger had eaten his fill. Since tigers crawl into the bush for a nap after they have eaten their fill we decided that this animal was not far away, and after a round of inspection I could tell by the trampled grass and weeds which way he had gone.

Reed came quietly up with the pack of dogs, all held on leash by the coolies. I remained in the *boma* with my camera on my shoulder, held close to the opening toward the clearing, while Reed stood by my side with his rifle for our protection. I gave signals to the coolies to surround a certain spot to which I pointed.

When they had had time to surround the spot I gave a signal by imitating the call of a bird or a monkey, which indicated that they were to creep up closer. Then I gave a shrill whistle which meant that they were to release the dogs. The dogs released, they began yelping and the coolies hallooing with all their might.

When the noise began I saw the tiger rise from his hiding-place and look in every direction, not knowing which way to escape, for pandemonium reigned on all sides.

Toby, the big Airedale and most courageous of the pack, was the first to make an attack. Then Spot followed close behind. Soon the whole pack had surrounded the big cat, and were nipping at his haunches, then jumping back out of reach of his deadly claws.

I could see that he was a wonderful specimen. In a short time the dogs had worried him out into the open in full sight of our *boma*. Still concealed behind the bush, I ground out several feet of film while the dogs kept him busy. I decided to step out from cover for closer shots. With my thirty-pound camera resting against my shoulder I crept stealthily out of the *boma*, followed closely by Reed at my left, and my gun-bearer just behind me.

I ground out several more feet of film; then I saw Toby hurled about fifteen feet into the air by one swipe of the tiger's great paw. Although Toby got a long gash in his side from that swipe, he was not to be deterred. He came back with a vengeance to help finish the fight.

We were now within a range of fifty feet and I decided to move still closer for some more close-ups. I moved on with my right eye watching the fight through the view-finder; I was grinding away with Reed and my gun-bearer still by my side.

We must have been within a range of twenty-five feet when the tiger suddenly caught sight of us.

With my eyes still screwed to the view-finder, I heard a thunderous roar and saw the monster cat lunge in our

direction. I was elated at the fine shots I was getting. But when the tiger let out that blood-curdling roar I knew it was time for decided action on our part. I expected every second to hear a shot from Reed's rifle. When it didn't come I glanced about—to see Reed lying flat on his back with his hands and feet in the air. In the excitement he had taken a step backward and caught his heel in a creeper which sent him sprawling on his back. I reached back quickly for my own rifle from my gun-bearer—but he had fled, taking my rifle with him, and making for the nearest tree for safety.

The tiger was coming my way with amazing speed. When he was only about ten feet from me, I hurled my thirty-pound camera with all the strength I possessed, straight for his head. It landed squarely; the impact seemed to stun him temporarily and delayed his charge for a fraction of a second. With a trembling hand, I quickly drew my .45 from my belt and caught him between the eyes when his head was less than a foot from my gun.

Like a miracle happening, he fell dead at my feet—stretched out full length without even a kick. The bullet had penetrated his skull, dispatching him instantly. Never before nor since have I heard of any one killing a tiger with a revolver.

I confess it took me some time to regain my composure. I looked around to see Reed pale and trembling, pulling himself to his feet.

"By heaven," he said, "that was a narrow escape! But you've ruined the camera."

"Yes, it looks that way," I replied. "But that tiger might have ruined both you and me if I *hadn't* broken his charge with the camera!" I added, picking up the badly battered camera, and finding to my surprise that the valuable lens was not broken.

This tiger was the finest specimen we had yet taken. He measured nine feet ten inches from tip to tip, and weighed four hundred and twenty pounds; it required fifteen coolies to carry him into camp.

After this episode and one which happened about ten days later, I decided I must have a charmed life.

In our main hut, used for kitchen and store-room combined, we had built a furnace such as the natives use, on which to do our cooking. After Toby had been wounded by the tiger's blow we kept him in the kitchen rather than in the dogs' house near by. We had frequently warned the cook to see that the fire in the open furnace was completely extinguished after the evening meal had been cooked, for we knew how inflammable this hut of grass would be, if a fire should start in its fragile walls.

Mrs. Reed had come up from Phantiet to spend a few days in camp with us. One night while she was there we were aroused by the yelping of dogs and Mrs. Reed's screams of *"Fire!"* Mr. Reed and I awakened to see our kitchen all ablaze; we reached there just in time to save Toby from being roasted alive. All we were able to salvage was a couple of loaves of bread and a piece of venison.

SINCE all of our other provisions had burned, except the bread and venison, it was necessary for some one to go to the trading-station. Djering, the nearest trading-post, was eighty miles down the rough and perilous trail. I was elected to make the trip for supplies.

We had brought with us three native ponies which we sometimes rode when we went on our long hunting trips. They were chunky little animals about the size of a seven-hundred-pound Shetland pony—wiry, sure-footed and tough.

For my particular use I had a stubborn and vicious little stallion. Though he was as mean as a wild zebra, and would kick or bite at every opportunity, yet he was as faithful and reliable as an old plow-horse. On this tough little animal I set out one morning for Djering; I arrived well drenched, for it rained heavily during the afternoon.

As there was a telegraph-station there I wired to a supply-house in Phantiet to have a load of supplies sent to Djering for me by motor-truck. The next morning I bagged what supplies my little animal could carry with me, and prepared for my return journey to camp. In one side of the bag I had sugar, coffee and a small bag of flour, in the other side some tins of dehydrated vegetables and a few other sundries.

We could get eggs from the natives in our locality, but they insisted upon selling us half-hatched eggs, which they considered a great delicacy. When the commander at Djering offered me a dozen fresh eggs I could not refuse, though I didn't know how to carry them where they wouldn't get broken. If I placed them in the bag with other supplies they would surely get broken, I reflected. The only place I could think of where they would be safe was inside my shirt, resting on my belt. So I placed them there and started on my long journey.

My sturdy little animal carried me along at a jog-trot, and I managed to keep an even balance so I would not break the treasured eggs resting securely inside my shirt.

ABOUT noon I came to a place where the trail turned at an angle of about seventy-five degrees. When we reached the turn my horse suddenly halted, braced his forefeet and snorted. I couldn't see anything ahead under the thick foliage of the overhanging branches, and could think of no reason for his strange behavior, so I reached to the overhanging branches and broke off a good-sized switch to use as a persuader.

I lashed him on the neck and sides with my switch—but he refused to budge, and stood as still as if paralyzed. While lashing him, I had released the grip of my legs on his sides. He suddenly stiffened, did a bucking jump, and whirled, sending me sprawling flat on my belly.

The fall almost knocked the breath out of me, and I felt the eggs being smashed against my body. I knew that the minute I stood up my highly valued fresh eggs would be trickling down my legs like glue.

The reins were still looped over my arm and my horse stood quivering, trying to pull away from me. His persistence caused me to rise quickly to my feet lest he succeed in his efforts—and there less than thirty feet from me crouched a large tiger in the middle of the trail!

I grabbed my old trusty .45 from my belt and began firing. The horse, still jerking on the reins, disturbed my equilibrium and I could not take a good aim. The first two shots must have gone wild. But my third shot grazed the big cat's belly. He arched his back, leaped into the thick jungle, and I caught another glimpse of him as he disappeared into the ravine far below.

Again I thanked my lucky stars and my trusty .45 as I mounted my horse and started down the dark trail.

I arrived in camp about eight o'clock that evening with my body and clothes almost plastered together with dried eggs. When I unloaded my provisions I discovered that the coffee, sugar and flour had been thoroughly mixed in the mêlée. My narrow escape and my sad plight had left me in no good humor; while Mr. Reed looked upon the situation as a huge joke I took a bath, put on my pajamas and rolled into my cot in a very disgruntled mood. But I guess I'd been lucky, at that!

On Page 1 of this issue will be found full details of our prize offer for stories of Real Experience.

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